

DENISE AND NED TODDLES



GABRIELLE E. JACKSON

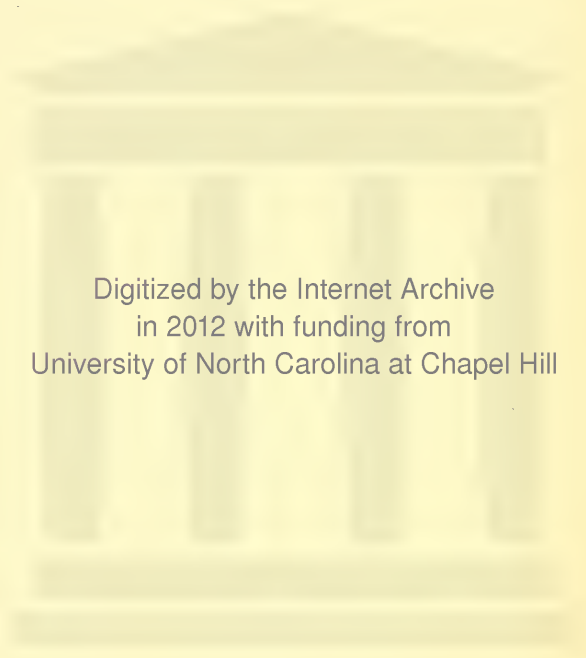


To—

Miss. Sallie Taliaferro Cameron
of Richmond Virginia

From

J. S. Whitley



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012 with funding from
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

DENISE
AND NED TODDLES



THE NEW PONY.

DENISE AND NED TOODLES



A True Story



BY
GABRIELLE E. JACKSON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
C. M. RELYEA



NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.

1906

Copyright, 1898,
By THE CENTURY Co.

THE DEVINNE PRESS.

TO MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS

May and **Lillian**

WHO HAVE PROVEN THEM-
SELVES VERY KIND AND GEN-
TLE CRITICS, THIS LITTLE TALE
IS MOST AFFECTIONATELY
INSCRIBED BY THE AUTHOR

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I A BIRTHDAY SURPRISE	I
II "SOME DAYS MUST BE DARK AND DREARY"	11
III NED'S CHRISTMAS GIFT	21
IV HOW DENISE AND NED SET UP HOUSE- KEEPING.	27
V GENTLEMAN NED'S QUARTERS	34
VI COOKING, HOUSEKEEPING, AND "POKEY"	42
VII FARMER SUTTON	52
VIII AN INVITING LANE	64
IX HOUSE-CLEANING AND MISCHIEF	70
X AN EPIDEMIC OF MISCHIEF	81
XI NED DEVELOPS A TASTE FOR TAFFY	90
XII CAPTAIN HAMILTON'S PLAN	101
XIII PATSY MURPHY	109
XIV BIRTHDAY PLANS	121
XV POKEY HAS A DREAM	130
XVI A NUTTING-PARTY	137
XVII POKEY TRIES TO STUDY BOTANY	148
XVIII THE "CHAPEL"	155

	PAGE
XIX ANXIOUS HOURS	166
XX AN HOUR OF ANGUISH	176
XXI THANKSGIVING	182
XXII POKEY COMES TO SPEND CHRISTMAS	192
XXIII NED IS PUT THROUGH HIS PACES	199
XXIV STOCKINGS	207
XXV THE STAR ACTOR'S FAREWELL APPEARANCE	217

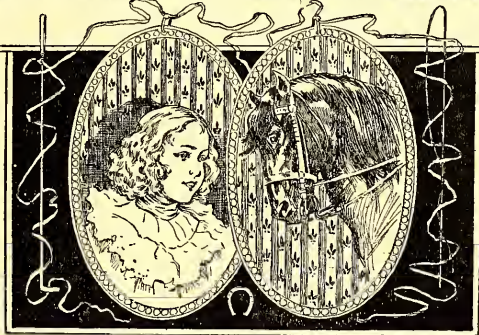
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

THE NEW PONY	<i>Frontispiece</i>	
		PAGE
LAST OF ALL CAME THE GOOD-BY TO NED, AND IT WAS MORE THAN DENISE COULD ENDURE .		15
A BEAUTIFUL LITTLE HOUSE HAD BEEN BUILT IN THE YARD		29
FUNNIEST OF ALL WERE THE DINNERS GIVEN TO NED, TAN, AND THE DOGS		45
DENISE AND POKEY PETTED THE LITTLE LAMB		61
AFTER THE HOUSE WAS IN ORDER, THE DOLLS HAD TO BE DRESSED		73
THE PAN AND SPOONS WERE FLYING WILDLY OUT INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD		93
PATSY		113
NED REACHED OUT AND GRABBED THE CANDY.		117
IT TOOK MANY DAYS AND MUCH PATIENCE BE- FORE NED WAS PRONOUNCED PERFECT		127
THE BIRTHDAY PARTY IN THE WOODS		141
IN THE CHAPEL		159
ANXIOUS HOURS		169
SLEIGHING ON THANKSGIVING DAY		185
THE THANKSGIVING PARTY		189
CHRISTMAS MORNING		209
THE TINY CUTTER SKIMMING OVER THE SMOOTH ICE		221



DENISE AND NED TODDLES

DENISE AND NED TODDLES



CHAPTER I

A BIRTHDAY SURPRISE

MANY years ago (so many that the writer's little daughter, when told how many, asked: "Mama, are you a hundred years old yet?") there lived in a pretty town on the banks of the Hudson River, not many miles from New York, a little girl named — well, we will call her Denise. That was not her real name, but some one who is very closely related to her now bears it, and so we will give it to her.

She had neither brother nor sister, and was sometimes a little bit lonely, even though she

had a number of pets, including dogs, kittens, rabbits, birds, and a beautiful big goat named "Tan" to drive about in a little carriage. Tan loved her dearly, and, when not harnessed to his carriage, would follow her about like her big Newfoundland dog, "Sailor." No matter where Denise went, the goat "was sure to go," until people used to laugh and say, "Here come Tan and Denise," instead of "Denise and Tan."

The little girl loved her pets as dearly as they loved her; but the dream and desire of her life was to have a dear little pony to ride and drive, and — last but by no means least — to love; her fondness for horses amounted to a passion, and with them she was absolutely fearless. They, in turn, seemed to love and comprehend her to a wonderful degree, responding to her voice and submitting to her caresses when they were often fractious and quite unruly with others.

So it seemed a very gratifying ending to the long-cherished wish, when, on her tenth birthday, one bright October morning, her father said to her:

"Many happy returns of the day, my pet! Run to Mama, and ask her to dress you for a

walk. I 've a surprise at the end of it for both her and you."

"Another surprise!" exclaimed Denise. "Why, I thought I 'd seen all the surprises before breakfast!"

"No, dear; I 've another. It 's a little thing, and if you don't like it you may tell it to just run away, as you have no place for it."

"Now, what *can* it be?" thought Denise, as she hurried up-stairs, and, bursting into Mama's room, cried: "Oh, Mama, dress me quickly, please, for Papa has a walk at the end of a surprise, and you 're not to know a thing about it, either!"

Never were curls made tidy so quickly, or clothes scrabbled on in such a hurry. Before Papa had time to find hat, gloves, or cane, a very excited little girl stood before him crying: "If you don't start quickly, I just know my head will fly off—like a bottle of soda-water that 's all fizz!"

About thirty minutes' walk along the shore of the beautiful river, whose waters seemed to dance and sparkle in sympathy with Denise as she pranced and skipped along, brought them to the village, where Papa turned down a side street which led to a livery- and board-

ing-stable. Denise's heart began to beat so loudly that she felt sure it could be heard, and her brown eyes to sparkle as though some one had dropped a little diamond into each.

"Oh, me!" she whispered to herself. "I just *know* it's a new carriage and set of harness for Tan! Papa has asked Mr. Andrews to get it for me because he heard me say that the old ones were getting very shabby for such a handsome goat."

Tan, by the way, was an unusually large specimen of his kind, measuring quite thirty-two inches at the shoulders, and boasting a head and pair of horns that were the admiration of all who saw them. He was named Tan because of the color of his hair, which was a bright tan, and shone like satin when well brushed by John, the coachman. So the prospect of a new harness and carriage for Tan was quite enough to set Denise's heart dancing.

At last the stable was reached, and the first thing her eyes fell upon was a beautiful little phaëton with bright yellow wheels, and a shining top that could be raised and lowered, "just like big folks'."

In the bottom, for her feet to rest upon, was a little yellow Angora-wool rug, to match the color of the wheels. On the seat was a soft, white wool blanket, bound with yellow silk, and in one corner was fastened a big blanket-pin that was certainly intended to pin that blanket snugly around something's throat. Over the shining dash-board was folded a handsome fur robe, made of a leopard's skin, and trimmed all round the edges with wildcat's fur.

The leopard's head looked very fierce, as it stared at Denise with big glass eyes; but I hardly think that a live leopard would have made much impression on her, so speechless and dumb had this fascinating sight turned her.

But when she went closer, and took out the exquisite little whip which stood in the whip-socket, and read her own initials on the gold band which held the dainty ivory handle to the snakewood stick, her joy began to pour forth in a torrent of words which quite drowned the remark of old John, who stood by, enjoying it all as though the whole thing had been planned for one of his own little Johns at home.

"Whisht, darlint! while I roon and fitch up the little hoorse that fits insoide," said he, as he disappeared through a side door.

Presently Denise's ears heard a patter, patter! patter, patter! Looking behind her, she beheld the dearest, darlingest little pony that any one ever saw!

He was black as a crow from the tip of his saucy little nose to the end of the long silky tail that dragged on the ground behind him, except one little white moon just back of his right eye, which seemed to have been put there on purpose to kiss, it was so soft and round.

For a moment Denise did not move or speak, and then, with a cry of delight which amply repaid her father for his long weeks of searching and planning for this perfect little turnout, she flung her arms around the pony's neck and laughed and cried and kissed him until the poor little fellow was quite bewildered, and did not know whether his new mistress was one to be desired or avoided.

Presently, however, he decided that it was all right, and, with a little neigh, he thrust his soft nose into her hands, pressed his face close to hers, searched her pockets for

sugar, and tried to say as plainly as a horse could :

“This is my new little mistress, and as she seems to love me already, I ’m going to show her how much *I* can love her.”

Then John produced the harness that fitted the “little hoorse” which “fitted insoide,” and before many minutes the new pony was harnessed to the phaëton that had been made to his measure.

No words can express the rapture of that drive. To hold the pretty reins and feel the prompt response given by the well-trained little animal ; to watch his pranks and antics as he dashed along, apparently trying to show how graceful he could be in order to convince his new mistress that he left nothing to be desired — it really seemed too good to be true, and Denise feared that it might all be a dream from which she would waken and find that pony and all had vanished !

The little feet fairly flew over the ground, and the drive home was quite the shortest she had ever known.

Mama stood on the piazza, watching for the surprise to come ; and when she saw the handsome pony and the carriage with her

husband and her own little daughter sitting in it come dashing up the driveway, she was as much pleased as mothers usually are when they know that their little girls' dearest wishes are realized.

The entire household had to be summoned to see and admire this pony, which was surely more wonderful than any pony that had ever lived; and the charming little fellow was talked to and caressed and petted and fed with apples and sugar until he was in a very fair way to be made ill.

"And now," said Denise, "what shall we name him, Mama?"

"You must name him yourself, darling," answered Mama, "for he is all your very own, to love and care for."

"Well," said Denise, in a tone which settled the matter beyond all question, "I'm going to call him 'Ned Toodles'; 'Ned' because he is as black as old darky Ned who comes for the ashes, and 'Toodles' because he is so little and round and roly-poly."

So "Ned Toodles" was the name given to the dear little pony, who thenceforth figured very conspicuously in the life and pranks of

his mistress, and now and again caused many a twinge of jealousy among the other pets.

At last Denise was persuaded to let Ned be led away to his new quarters, John exclaiming, as he marched off with his small charge in tow: "Faith! howiver am I to clane sooch a shcrap of a thing as this? I'll have to be hoontin' up a big box to shtand him on!"

And, sure enough, that was exactly what he had to do, and it took but a short time for the intelligent little animal to learn just what the box was for; as soon as his stall was opened, he would march out, get upon the box, stand very still while he was curried, and then lift first one dainty little foot and then each of the others to have it properly cleaned and washed.

Nothing gave John greater satisfaction than to brush the beautiful coat until it shone like moleskin, and to comb the silky mane and tail until each particular hair seemed to stand out for very pride.

Ned soon grew to love his little mistress very dearly, and to answer with a loud neigh the queer, piping whistle by which she always called to him.

No pen can describe the delightful drives of the charming autumn days. Jack Frost seemed particularly gracious that year, and painted the trees more gorgeously than ever before. At least, it seemed so to Denise; but perhaps seeing it all from her own little carriage as she drove along in the golden sunshine, singing to Ned a certain little song of which he never seemed to tire, gave an added charm to everything.

This song was all about a "poor little robin," whose name was "Toodle-de-too"; and Ned seemed to think that it had been composed especially for him, and would invariably go very slowly as soon as Denise began to sing it, and would turn back one ear, as though to hear it better.

When the song was ended he would give a funny little jump of approval, and then trot on again.

And so the happy autumn days sped by, and the longer she owned him the more certain little Denise felt that there never had been so happy an introduction before as that which made her acquainted with her sagacious, affectionate pony, Ned Toodles.

CHAPTER II

“SOME DAYS MUST BE DARK AND DREARY”

THE days slipped quickly by. Each crisp, frosty morning Denise drove Papa to the station, and each evening went to fetch him home. At first Ned did not know what to make of the big iron horse that came snorting and panting into the depot, and was strongly tempted to jump and run. But Denise was too good a horse-woman to permit such pranks, and it was not long before she quieted his fears, and in a short time he was ready to follow her right up to the engine and touch it with his nose wherever she laid her hand upon it, let it pant and puff as hard as it could.

The engineer seemed to consider it a good joke, and often came down out of his cab to speak to Denise and stroke little Ned's soft nose.

Many years have passed, but the engineer

is still at his post, running engine 274, and never fails to have a kind word and smile for the little Denise who now skips and dances beside the one whose pony he used to pet and helped to teach that locomotives were not going to run off their tracks just to chase small horses.

The confidence Ned grew to feel in his little mistress was wonderful to witness, and there was simply nothing she could not do with him, or induce him to do for her. Each morning brought its lessons with her governess, Miss Meredith, and from nine until twelve o'clock Master Ned had to amuse himself by watching John or the big horses, and telling his adventures to them in horse language.

He was very happy in his new home, and surely never was pony more beloved and petted.

So we cannot wonder that Denise felt as though her heart must break when, one evening in November, Papa said that it would be necessary for them to go to town for two or three months, and the house would have to be closed and left in the charge of the servants.

"But, Papa," said Denise, "surely you will not leave *Ned* behind?"

"I fear we must, little daughter," was the reply. "We shall have no place in town to keep him; and even had we, I should not like my little girl to drive through the city streets, and we shall not be near the park."

Denise was not a model child, and did not possess a submissive spirit by any means; but she had been taught one thing, and taught thoroughly, and it was that teasing is selfish and inconsiderate, especially when once a wise reason has been given.

The reason was always forthcoming, and she was encouraged to look upon a question from all sides, and consequently many a wretched hour and trying scene were spared.

So now she struggled against the tears which would well up in spite of her bravest efforts, and said:

"Please, Papa, may I come sometimes to see him and the other children?" For her pets seemed like children to her, which must be loved and taught as she herself was by Papa and Mama, whom she considered the very wisest and best that had ever lived.

"Darling, let me tell you something," said

Papa, drawing her to him and holding her close. "I do not wish to promise something I may be unable to fulfil, and so I'll tell you at once that it is very improbable that you will get out to see 'the children' before our return in March. But I want my little girl to try to be patient, as the months will soon slip away and I hardly think she will regret it in the end. Ned will be well cared for during your absence, for John is very fond of his small charge, and will never forget his morning lump of sugar, nor the tidbits for the other pets."

All too soon came the morning when all was ready for the short journey to the city. It was a gloomy, showery morning, as though the weather was in sympathy with Denise and was glad to feel dismal too.

The pets were all visited for the last time. The rabbits had their parsley, the kittens their saucer of milk, Sailor a bone saved from breakfast, and Tan his carrot.

The four birds and "Beauty Buttons"—the little black-and-tan terrier—were to accompany the family to town, so only Ned and the big horses remained to be bidden farewell.



"LAST OF ALL CAME THE GOOD-BY TO NED, AND IT WAS MORE
THAN DENISE COULD ENDURE."

Into the great box-stalls went Denise with her sugar, for the little girl was perfectly fearless, and knew that the horses loved her too dearly to harm her in any way.

Their big, silky heads were thrust down beside her face, and the great, intelligent eyes looked at her as though trying to express their love and good-by in a language we can soon understand if we are fond of the beautiful dumb creatures.

"Good-by, 'Sunshine,'" said Denise, holding the warm muzzle close to her face. "Be a good horse and don't forget me."

Then going into the adjoining stall, she laid her face against "Flash's" silky neck, and the great beast, although well meriting his name, was as quiet as a lamb.

"Good-by, dear old horse. I'll come back just the very minute I can, and give you and Sunshine such lots of sugar to pay up for all you'll miss while I'm gone."

Last of all came the good-by to Ned, and it was more than Denise could endure; so putting her arms around the soft, warm neck, she hid her face in the shaggy mane and sobbed as hard as she could sob.

"Oh, Ned, Ned, Ned! how am I *ever* to get

on without you?" she cried. And the little fellow seemed to realize that something was very, very wrong, for he laid his head on her shoulder and gave a soft, subdued little whinny, very unlike those he usually gave his little mistress, as though he was trying to comfort her.

It was a comfort, for after a time the bitter sobs ceased, and Denise kissed him again and again, and at last left him to good John, who was much affected by the pathetic little scene, and vowed a mighty vow in his kind Irish heart that "thot shmall hoorse should be afther havin' the best attintion John Noonan could give him."

When Denise joined her father and mother, the traces of tears told them how hard the parting had been for their little girl.

"Poor little thing," whispered Mama; "I really believe she has suffered as keenly as you or I would, were we called upon to part with a dear friend, for Ned has become a part of her very existence."

"Well," answered Papa, "if it is within my power, I shall make it up to her in some way, for she has yielded without a murmur and made her sacrifice very bravely, dear little

body! But I have a plan in my head, which, with a little help from you, dear, I think, will make her return home such a happy one that she will never regret having been so considerate of us."

Presently all were on the train speeding toward New York; and as they flew along, going farther and farther from the beloved pony, Papa and Mama talked over the plan in a tone too low for Denise to guess that *she* was the subject of the conversation, or ever to dream of the wonderful plan which was being turned about for her happiness.

So her little moan was made; and at the end of a few hours she found herself established in a big hotel in the city, with enough noise and bustle all about her to keep both eyes and ears busy, and help her forget for a time a pert little head and pair of soft brown eyes far away up the river.

But only for a short time; for often during the three months in town she felt as though she *must* run away for one hug and one kiss on the tiny white moon beside Ned Toodles's right eye.

Good reports, however, came from John, for the faithful creature nearly paralyzed his

fingers in his endeavors to keep Denise well informed; and before she realized it December had nearly passed, and Christmas, with its innumerable pleasures, surprises, and what not, was at hand; and Christmas to Denise usually meant a great deal, and brought with it enough to keep eyes, ears, and hands busy for several months.

This year was to be no exception, for Ned must figure in all the plans, and how he fared must be told in another chapter.

CHAPTER III

NED'S CHRISTMAS GIFT

“**M**AMA,” said Denise, one morning, shortly before Christmas, “what *can* I get for Ned’s Christmas present? He does n’t need a new blanket, or anything of that sort, so what shall it be?”

“Surely he must have something, and who shall say what?” answered Mama, who usually entered heart and hand into her little girl’s plans.

“Seems to me he has just everything now, and I can’t think of a single thing for him,” said Denise, in despair.

“Suppose we ask Papa to help us answer so weighty a question,” suggested her mother.

“Just the thing!” cried Denise; and when Papa arrived the problem was given to him to solve.

“Something for Ned? Have n’t you forgotten that little black scamp?” said he, pinching Denise’s cheek.

"Forgotten Ned! As though I *could* forget him for one half-minute!" exclaimed Ned's mistress, indignantly.

"And he must have something, must he? Why not send him a little stick and have it fastened up in his stall to act as a hint for good behavior?"

"You 're not to tease me another bit, but just sit down in that chair, so"—pushing him into the easy-chair—"and let me crawl into your lap, so"—curling herself into a little round ball like a kitten—"and think as hard as ever you can think."

"'A horse! a horse! My kingdom for a horse!—a very little one!'" said Papa, laughing. "That ever I should have to sit down and think seriously of what I should give a *horse* for his Christmas, you small tyrant! Well, there, suppose we take a walk tomorrow A. M. to a store I happen to know of, and we will see what can be found."

"I just believe you 've ordered something already," said Denise, "and have talked all this nonsense to make me believe you had n't thought a thing of it."

"You do 'muchee thinkee,' as Sam Sing said to me a few days since, when I asked him how he managed to keep track of all his

laundry work. That little head of yours should n't be able to 'muchee think' at Christmas-tide, don't you know that?" was her father's answer.

Bright and early the next morning the trio started out, Papa leading the way to a big harness-store on Broadway, which he entered as though he were no stranger to the place.

"How is my order coming on, Mr. Lenox?" was the first question put.

"Finally, sir; what do you think of it?" said the salesman, bringing from a case a beautiful little side-saddle, bridle, and whip.

Denise clapped her hands and exclaimed, "I knew it! I knew it!" but whether she meant the saddle or whip was not explained.

"Is this the young lady who is to mount this saddle?" asked Mr. Lenox. "Suppose we try how it sits, little miss"; and he placed it upon a small wooden horse standing at hand. After adjusting everything properly, he lifted Denise to her seat and placed the reins and whip in her hands.

"Oh, if it were only Ned Toodles!" said she. "It would be simply perfect! Do you think it will fit, Papa?"

"I should n't wonder if it did, for Ned sent

me his waist measure and told me he preferred gray castor to brown for the seat."

"I'm going to write to John the very minute I get home, and ask him to tell Ned all about it. He'll understand and be delighted, I know," said Denise, half beside herself with pleasure.

But, as often happens, one acquisition necessitates number two, and it was soon discovered that a saddle and bridle without a habit were very like a cart without a horse; and the next question to be answered was, What shall the habit be?

"That," said Papa, "is not in my line, and I'll leave it to Mama and you."

"Then my suggestion," said Mama, when the question was submitted, "would be a brown habit, brown hat, and brown gloves to match brown eyes and brown hair. What do you say to it?"

So, brown it was; and in due time all was completed, and it was only necessary for spring to come in order to try the effect of saddle, bridle, habit, and all.

Christmas morning dawned bright and frosty, and "Merry Christmas!" "Merry Christmas!" sounded back and forth from Denise's room and Papa's and Mama's; for

sleep was quite out of the question, when a big tree with plenty of pretty things on it, and bundles galore lying beneath, stood just beyond a closed door in Mama's sitting-room. So instead of forty extra winks for a holiday it was many less, and the dressing was done in short order.

Denise could scarcely swallow her breakfast, so eager was she to see the gifts. And well she might be, for few little girls were more generously remembered than this fortunate little one whose true story I am telling you. But at last the breakfast was disposed of, and to Denise it seemed as though Papa had never eaten so heartily or so slowly.

But all things come to an end, and in time Papa's appetite was appeased, and he was ready to distribute the pretties.

First, a wonderful dolly with a wardrobe which might have served as a model for any society belle, and a perfect little trunk in which to keep the charming toilets. This was Papa's gift. From Mama came the entire set of Miss Alcott's stories, prettily bound, and ready for Denise's little library at home. Aunt Helen sent a bedroom set for the young lady doll, consisting of bureau, bed, wash-stand, table, and chairs, and also a


dear little sideboard for the dishes at home. Then, too, there were games and all sorts of pretty remembrances from friends far away who never forgot her, no matter how great the distance that separated them.

Of course the dolly had to be named, and Denise usually managed to think out some name befitting the recipient. In this case it happened to be Rosamund Marie Lombard and all agreed that it suited the young lady admirably. Every costume had to be tried on and admired and criticized by the assembled family. But after many trials the lavender satin ball dress was pronounced the "loveliest," and the young lady wore it the entire day, to the great distress of the other dolls, who felt decidedly cast into the shade by her splendor.

It was no wonder that, with so much to read and play with, the days after Christmas slipped away so quickly that February crept upon them before Denise could realize it. Soon there were only weeks, then only days to be counted before it would be time to pack the trunks for the homeward journey. These, too, soon slipped by, and the grand day itself arrived.

CHAPTER IV

HOW DENISE AND NED SET UP HOUSEKEEPING

N the way home Denise felt as if she must shout and sing for very joy. It was simply a physical impossibility to keep still, when the prospect of meeting Ned Toodles was so near at hand; and her fellow-travelers smiled from sheer sympathy when they caught sight of her happy face and heard the incessant chatter of the excited little maid.

As the train drew into the station, Denise's eyes swept the driveway at one glance.

"Oh, I see him! I see him!" she shouted; "John has brought him to meet me!" and she almost plunged headlong upon the platform.

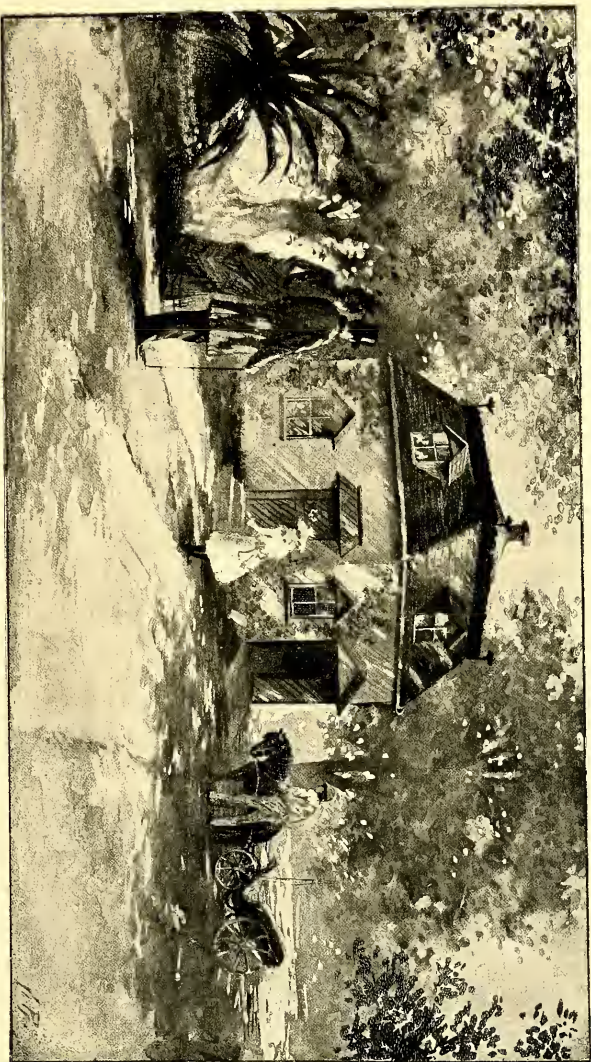
Sure enough, there was little Mr. Ned, as perky as ever, with both ears pointing forward to hear her voice, which he at once recognized and answered with a loud and joyous neigh.

Such a happy meeting! It was difficult to tell which was the happier, Denise or Ned, for he whinnied and snorted and "hoo-hooed," and made all sorts of remarkable sounds. He put his head first on one and then on the other side of Denise's face. He turned it so that the little white moon could be kissed, for, though probably quite unaware that any little white moon was there at all, he still remembered that it was just there she most often kissed him, and he wished her to know that he had not forgotten it. It was plain that he wished her to know that he had not forgotten her.

"Denise, my darling," said Mama at last, "won't you *please* get into the phaëton and drive home, or I fear there will be no Ned left to carry you."

Little did Denise dream of what had happened during her absence, or what a delightful surprise awaited her at the end of the drive.

The first thing that caught Denise's eye as she drove into their own pretty grounds was a beautiful little house that had been built in the yard near the stable. A pretty little French-roofed affair it was, with a window on every side, both up-stairs and down, and two



"A BEAUTIFUL LITTLE HOUSE HAD BEEN BUILT IN THE YARD."



doors, one of which looked very like the front door of a house, and the other decidedly like a stable door.

"Now, whatever can that be?" thought she. "Surely it can't be for John and his family, for it is n't big enough for them. Why have they built that funny little house in our grounds?"

Meanwhile her father and mother had left their carriage and had walked over to this remarkable house; so Denise drove over to them, for a branch road from the main driveway led most invitingly to it. On the door was a little brass plate, and upon it was engraved:

MISS DENISE LOMBARD AND MR. NED TODDLES.
--

"Papa," exclaimed Denise, "you've had a play-house built for Ned and me! Oh! oh! oh! was *ever* anything so sweet?" and she spun around in a perfect ecstasy.

"May we walk into your parlor?" asked

Mama. "Here 's the key." Denise took it as if it were something that might vanish if roughly handled, and opened the door.

She stood transfixed upon the threshold, too astounded to go farther. The front door opened into a little room fitted up like a dining-room. On the hard-wood floor lay a pretty rug, upon which stood the dolls' extension-table, with table-cloth and dishes all laid for dinner. In one corner stood Aunt Helen's present, the little sideboard, which had been sent on with the other luggage a few days before.

Two chairs stood beside it—chairs that had never been made for big people, although quite strong enough to hold them, if necessary.

A door from this room led to another just beyond, which was evidently the kitchen, for there stood the little cooking-stove, and in it crackled and snapped a fire of charcoal, while a little coal-hod stood beside it, filled with fuel, so as to keep the tiny stove always well supplied.

Poker, shovel, and holder were handy by, on the hooks; and upon shelves stood all the things needed in a complete kitchen. The

table stood waiting to be used, and even the tiny kitchen-apron was not forgotten.

As soon as she could move, Denise rushed from one thing to another, nearly beside herself with excitement, while the authors of this charming plan stood reaping their reward for all the thought and care spent upon the happiness of their little girl.

"You precious, precious Moddie!" cried Denise, throwing her arms about her mother's neck; "you did all this for me, and I don't know how I 'm ever to thank you hard enough!"

"But, darling," said Mama, as she unwound the little arms, "it was not *I* alone. You must let dear Papa and Miss Alcott share the thanks, for it took all three to bring about this pleasure for you. Papa thought of one part, I another; and when we read 'Little Men' this winter, Aunt Jo's kitchen for Daisy and Nan suggested this one for you. And I want my little girl to use hers as carefully and wisely as they used theirs, and to become as skilful a little cook. And Ned Toodles is to be your company, for he is close by. Now, dear, open this door, and find out to what it leads."

CHAPTER V

GENTLEMAN NED'S QUARTERS

DENISE crossed the kitchen, and opening the door, found herself in a complete miniature stable. Before her stood the phaëton, and also a new wagon of the sort called a "depot-wagon." It had two seats, and was certainly built for service. Just beyond was a big closet with a glass door, through which could be seen the harness, the blankets, and a shining new collar to be used with the depot-wagon.

There, too, hung the saddle and bridle, and a dozen other things necessary for a well-bred and self-respecting pony. At the farther side of the room were two dainty box-stalls—one, with two wooden bars across, for a day-stall; the other with a door balanced by heavy weights so that it would raise and lower like a window-sash. The bars on the day-stall were held in place by

wooden pegs, which fact led to serious mischief a few months later.

The weights that balanced the door of the night-stall hung down on the inside, and the door was as easily raised and lowered as a well-hung window. Directly in the center a hole had been cut in which to place the hand to raise the door; and peeping through that hole Denise saw a big brown eye, while through the door came the unspellable sound horses make when they welcome you — “Hoo-hoo-hoo, hoo-hoo-hoo!” It meant, as plainly as words could have said it, “I want to come out, for I don’t belong in this stall in the daytime.”

While Denise had been admiring her play-house, John had unharnessed Ned and tucked him safely away; for he was more than anxious that all should be in proper shape to receive the little mistress’s first visit.

“Hush!” whispered Denise. “Let’s make believe we don’t hear him.”

Presently a great bang, banging began; for, failing to attract his share of attention by snorting, Ned decided to resort to more active measures, and set about slamming the

weights against the side of his stall by poking them with his saucy little nose.

"Mercy me!" exclaimed Denise. "He will bang the door down!" and she flew to open it.

Out walked the young scamp, as serenely as though slamming weights about had never entered his head.

Stopping for a moment to take a good look at his guests, he decided that they were his friends, that this was his own domicile, and that the bin of oats was his own property.

Walking over to it, he proceeded to get at the contents by calmly raising the lid with his teeth, and then prepared to eat his fill.

"Well," said Papa, "you *are* a young fellow of resources. When did you learn *that* trick?"

"Faith," said John, "he 'll just be afther doin' that iviry chance he gets; and he *niver* has to *learn* anything. He knows it alriddy."

"Well, we can't have him up to such pranks, or he will eat till he kills himself. John, you must put a fastening on this bin. And *you*," he added, as he dragged Ned away by his forelock, "just toddle back to your stall!"

But Master Ned had no notion of being shut up in his stall again, and with a saucy shake of his head, and funny little jumps, he went straight over to the barrel of soft feed which stood beside the pail of water, and lifting off the lid, plunged his nose into the meal, which flew in all directions.

"I declare, he is worse than a monkey!" cried Papa, as he made a second dive for the marauder. But Denise caught his hand and, between her shouts of laughter, begged her father to let Ned be, and see what next would happen. What Ned did was to poke and push the barrel until he had tilted it over toward the pail of water, when a lot of the meal ran into the pail. This he proceeded to swish about till he had a most delectable mess, and he was daubed with meal from his nose to his ear-tips.

It was funny beyond words to watch the sagacious little pony, for he seemed to reason out exactly how a thing should be done, and then do it.

When at last he was safely bestowed in his day-stall, he promptly turned his back upon his visitors, and acted as if he would have nothing further to say to them.

"John," said Papa, as they were about to leave the stable, "I think you had better have combination locks put on everything, and then we shall be safe—at least, till Ned Toodles learns the combination."

Returning to the play-house, they mounted the pretty staircase that led up aloft, and came to a little bedroom with all Denise's furniture and dollies. Off this was a small room in which were placed her various toys and treasures. A partition divided this from the "up-stairs" which belonged to Ned's side; and Denise said it was a mercy that he had not learned to climb steps during their absence, or he would dispose of the provisions stowed away for him here.

"Am I really to play here, and have it all for my very own?" asked Denise, as if it were too delightful to be true, and must hold some conditions to make it really, truly hers.

"It is really your very own, my pet," said Papa. "Play here all you like, and make your patty-cakes or putty-cakes, or whatever you call them. Mama and I have done this to thank you for doing so much for us."

"Why, what have I done?" asked Denise in surprise.

“You have always given us both that which we would rather receive than all the costly gifts you could find — cheerful obedience. It was hard to leave the new pet last fall, we know, and we were both grieved to compel you to do so; but you did so without a murmur, and we chose this way to prove how much we appreciated it.”

Denise's eyes filled with tears, and she clung tightly to the dear ones whom she loved so tenderly, feeling that her reward was more than she merited.

But the sunshine soon came back, and was all the brighter for the tender little shower.

So there was the complete little play-house, and next door was the tiny stable which held the dearest little playfellow one could desire.

Of course the other pets had to be visited before Denise could tear herself away long enough to go into the big house to lay aside her belongings.

All were happy to welcome her home, and each showed joy in its own peculiar manner. Tan, the goat, bleated and licked her hand. Sailor, the Newfoundland, threatened to upset her at every step by rubbing against her and getting under her feet. The pussies

purred and mewed and jumped into her lap and on her shoulder. Even the bunnies seemed to realize that their little mistress had come home, and all came hurrying up to the fence when she called to them, their ears flapping and noses wriggling in bunny fashion.

John had to answer at least fifty questions regarding the condition and behavior of the family, and was never weary of extolling their exemplary conduct — especially Ned's; for Toodles, he declared, was "the best and jolliest little baste he iver had the curryin' of."

"W'u'd ye belave it? — he l'arnt how to turn on the wather-spigot when the hose-poise is on; and may I be bate if he don't take the ind of the poise in his mouth and dhrink like a sojer! Come now till ye see him"; and he led the way into the stable.

After fastening on the short hose-pipe, he let it lie on the floor, and then went over to Ned's stall and took down the bars. Out came the small atom of horse-flesh, and walking over to the hydrant, turned the little handle that started the water running. When it came flowing out at the end of the hose he deliberately picked up the spout with his teeth, and sucked away till he had all he

wanted, when he let the hose fall, and marched back to his stall. Shouts of laughter from all greeted this performance, and Ned seemed quite gratified.

At last the excitement subsided, and all went indoors. Papa said he believed the arrival of a circus could not have caused a greater commotion; and certainly no circus could have had a pony who could learn more cleverly than little Mr. Ned, although his training had but just begun, as later events and association with his bright and original little mistress proved.

CHAPTER VI

COOKING, HOUSEKEEPING, AND "POKEY"

HOW am I ever to tell all that took place that spring? I don't believe I can remember one half; and if I could, I doubt whether the lads and lassies who read this would think it true. But they must; for, if they wish, they can go to that town and see the very house where it all happened.

The old apple-trees still stand there, and I dare say the blossoms are just as sweet as they were that spring when they showered white flakes on Denise as she sat beneath them in her hammock, or climbed up into the branches where John had nailed seats and fastened a box, all nicely covered with oil-cloth, to hold her books and treasures safe from wind and rain.

Of course the lessons filled the mornings from nine to one o'clock till vacation came in

June; but the afternoons were given up to Ned and the "Bird's Nest," as the play-house was named.

Every Saturday morning Mama donned a big gingham apron and went out to the Nest to give lessons in cooking; for this delightful play had been planned not wholly for amusement, but that Denise might learn in the pleasantest way imaginable how to become a skilful little cook. And years after she often had cause to thank the good, thoughtful mother, who so wisely combined lessons and pleasure that one forgot all about the labor, and saw only the fun. So bread was baked, and biscuits were made — although the latter might at first have served for bullets, had such been required. But that occurred only when the pretended "Bridget" forgot so trifling a matter as baking-powder. Then there were cakes that rose nearly to the top of the oven, and pies that smelt so delicious that they caused old Sailor to act as Denise's devoted attendant till she had to drive him off by threats with the rolling-pin.

It was funny to see the serious way in which she went about her housekeeping. No staid old housekeeper ever felt weightier re-

sponsibility than Denise found in the care of this tiny house; for besides the cooking-lessons, there were sweeping, dusting, bed-making, and mending to be learned. People who keep house properly, and have families on their hands, have, of course, to know all these things.

Funniest of all were the dinners given to Ned, Tan, and the dogs. After some delectable mess had been prepared, the table was set, and the viands were placed thereon. Then Denise would whistle, and in would walk Master Ned, followed by old Tan.

In they would come; and Denise, leading first one and then the other to his place at the table, would admonish them not to touch a thing till she helped them. Nor would they, although they looked with longing eyes at the cakes and other tempting things, and Sailor and Beauty stood beside her with tongues fairly lolling out of their mouths.

Then Denise would place something on each little plate, and when *that* point was reached animal forbearance could stand it no longer, and the dainty would vanish in one gulp. The articles of diet which found their way down those animals' throats I should n't

"FUNNIEST OF ALL WERE THE DINNERS GIVEN TO NED, TAN, AND THE DOGS."



dare name. But all was fish that came to their nets, and if Denise ate it they would, providing it was a vegetable production. Sailor and Beauty were a great blessing, for what Ned and Tan disdained, they regarded as princely fare, and Mama used to say that they robbed old darky Ned's pigs.

To see the little girl seated at her table in her tiny dining-room, with a shaggy black pony standing at one end, a big tan-colored goat at the other, and a dog at either hand, made a picture which still dwells in the minds of many of the neighbors, who often came to witness the funny spectacle. To this day her very original and remarkable performances are talked of, and amusing tales are told of this peculiar child whose parents sanctioned such extraordinary conduct so long as the lessons were never neglected and absolute obedience given them in return for any happiness they could give to her.

Although utterly unselfish, Denise usually liked best to play alone with her pets. Her intense love for them seemed to give her a keener understanding of animals' natures than children usually feel, and she and they had a common language.

While other children might not be actually unkind to them, they sometimes could not resist teasing them a little; and that was more than Denise could tolerate. In Denise their confidence was boundless; but, at the same time, they understood that they must obey her, and her word could always guide or control them. So, with the exception of a few young friends who sometimes came, and a little girl from Brooklyn who visited her every summer, she rarely had other playmates than her four-footed ones, and was as happy as the day was long, and sang like a lark from morning till night. But she and the city friend, who were probably as unlike as two children well could be, always got on capitally together, and the date of her arrival was eagerly looked forward to. The welcome was invariably a warm one, and the wildest pranks were reserved for her visit. So no wonder that Denise should count the days that must pass before July could come and bring with it her beloved "Pokey"; for by this name, which fitted her so exactly, the boon companion was called. None could have suited her better, for she was never quite ready for anything; and breakfast,

luncheon, and dinner always found her just a little behind time, but invariably amiable.

Pokey was a thin slip of a girl with big blue eyes, light brown hair which fell far below her waist, and delicate, nervous features, and an expression that appealed to all, as it always seemed asking for affection, and rarely failed to win it, despite her sensitive nerves and many blunders. For Pokey certainly was a blunderer. How she ever managed to survive her many mishaps, no one ever attempted to guess, but accepted it as a matter of course that Pokey would come out all right, somehow.

But July, like March, came at last; and one bright, sunny afternoon, Denise drove to the depot to welcome her beloved Pokey. No princess could have felt greater pride than Denise, as she sat in her pretty little phaëton, awaiting the arrival of the train.

Ned was looking his best, for John had brushed and groomed him until he shone like satin; and Denise had spent hours tying pale blue satin ribbons on him, till mane, forelock, headstall, collar, saddle, breechen and whips fairly bristled blue satin bows, and his little owner, dressed in a dainty white gown with

blue sash, and blue feathers bobbing on a big white straw hat, lovingly greeted the astonished Pokey when Papa assisted her from the train.

After a rapturous meeting, Pokey was comfortably established in the phaëton, and Denise's pent-up feelings found vent in holding forth upon the innumerable good qualities of Ned. "Is n't he just all I wrote about him, and lots more?" she asked.

"Yes, he is sweet; but does he always go so fast and bounce about so much?" asked Pokey, whose experience with ponies in general was very limited. She had some misgivings about the conduct of this particular one.

"Bounce!" exclaimed Denise. "You don't call *that* bouncing, do you? Why, he is n't going fast *now*. Shall I make him, just to show you how well he *can* trot?"

"Mercy, *no!*" cried Pokey; for the ground seemed fairly to fly under them, and she fancied that Ned had a particularly mischievous sort of gait.

"Would you like to drive him a little way?" asked Denise, a moment later. "He has a lovely mouth, and you can guide him with the slightest touch."

"Drive him!" cried Pokey, in dismay. "I would n't drive him—not for—not for—well—pounds of candy! You must drive *always*; and don't you *ever* get out of the carriage and leave me in it, or I shall have a fit, right off!"

Denise's laugh rang out sweet and clear, and Papa called back from the big carriage to know if the fun had already commenced.


"Oh, yes; you will learn to drive, too. By and by you will get so fond of him that you will love him as dearly as I do."

"Maybe," was the skeptical reply; "but I don't believe I'll *ever* drive him." And she never did, but was perfectly content to sit quietly beside Denise and enjoy it all in her own subdued way.

These were blissful days for Pokey, and all the rest of the year was as a blank compared to the time spent in the country with the friends who always had such a warm welcome for her, and were so quick to appreciate her truly lovable character that with them all that was sweetest in their little visitor was drawn forth, as sunshine draws the perfume from the violet.

CHAPTER VII

FARMER SUTTON

UCH a vacation was never known — never were skies so blue, breezes so balmy, or rainy days so conspicuous by their absence. No day seemed quite long enough to hold all that was planned for each; and indeed they must have been forty-eight hours long to have enabled the children to carry out all their wild schemes. Pokey soon got used to Ned, even though she could not quite overcome the idea that he knew she was afraid of him, whether he was harnessed or following Denise about the grounds, and that he would roll his eyes at her as he never rolled them at any one else. It really seemed as if both Ned and Tan realized her fear, for if animals ever have a sense of fun, they certainly had. It was a common thing to see Pokey go flying across the lawn with Tan or Ned, and often both, in hot pursuit.

The poor child would fly for her life, and they would chase until they overtook her, and then pass by like a whirlwind; manes and tails straight up in the air, and blaating or snorting like wild things. But they never offered to molest her in any way and seemed to consider her running a huge joke.

Pokey usually rushed to an old apple-tree which grew in one corner of the grounds, and, once safe in its low-hanging limbs, breathed a sigh of relief.

Meanwhile, Denise, choking with laughter, would call to her to stop running, assuring her that Ned and Tan would not hurt her, and would n't run if she did n't.

"It's all very well to say 'stop running,' but I guess you'd run if you had a great pair of horns flying after you, and that little black villain who just *knows* he can frighten me nearly to death! Why does n't he chase other people, I'd like to know?" asked Pokey.

"It's just because you *do* run. He and Tan often play tag with me, and as soon as you start to run they think they must too; and you *do* look just too funny for anything, and I *can't* help laughing."

"Well, you may laugh all you want to, but

I 'm going to stay up in this tree, for I know they can't climb it even if they *do* put their feet on that low limb down there and try to. I think it is fine up here, and John was just splendid to fix all these little seats in it. I would rather stay up here and read, than have to run away from wild animals."

"All right," said Denise, "you stay there and read; but don't forget to lock the books in the box, please, when you 've done, for John put it up there on purpose for them and covered it all over with oil-cloth so the rain could n't wet them. Now I can go up there and read and not have to carry them back to the house when I have done. I 'd rather stay down here in the hammock, and then Ned and Tan can come and see me whenever they want to, and get their old noses rubbed." And Denise stretched herself out for a midsummer day's dream. She had not swung long when a patter of feet over the lawn told her that her mischievous "children" were near at hand, but hastily closing her eyes, she pretended to be sound asleep.

On they came, and slowly approaching the hammock thrust their warm noses very gently into her hands.

She kept perfectly still, and the little creatures stood motionless beside her, quite contented to be near and within reach of their little mistress's stroking fingers. It was a pretty picture, and one which Denise—who is now grown up and has a little Denise of her own—often recalls. She remembers the beautiful summer weather; the pretty house with its attractive grounds; the old apple-trees on the lawn, with the hammock swinging beneath in their shade, and the little girl lying in it, with a great tan-colored goat at one side, and a little black pony on the other, with their heads in the hammock, and their soft noses within reach of her hand. Sailor and Beauty lay on the grass close by, and, perched in the tree overhead, the little friend in her bright gingham dress looked like some gay fairy. Rather too literary, however, for Pokey was a veritable bookworm, and never happier than when left absolutely alone to read.

Not long after Pokey's arrival, Papa and Mama went on a journey, leaving Denise and Pokey to the care of Aunt Helen, who came to stay during their absence. Denise loved her almost as dearly as she loved her father

and mother, and was always delighted when she came, for Auntie indulged her little niece, and was always ready to enter into any plan for her pleasure. Denise used to say she liked "just to look at Aunt Helen; that it made her feel good because she was so pretty." And pretty she certainly was, with her great dark eyes, wavy black hair, and pretty white teeth.

Such plans as were made when Aunt Helen was installed as mistress of ceremonies!—tea-parties in the Bird's Nest; long drives with Ned, and little picnics at the end; bathing-parties in the river, with Sailor to act as swimming-master, and Beauty to stand on the shore barking like mad.

But the old saying that "when the cat is away the mice will play" had still to be verified, and these two children would have been more than mortal, had they not entered into some mischief.

One morning Aunt Helen announced that she must run into the city for a few hours, but would surely return by the one-thirty train for luncheon.

"Now, Denise," said she, as she was about to start, "be very careful during my absence.

If you need anything, go directly to Mary, and she will attend to you. John will harness Ned at nine o'clock, and you and Pokey may take a nice drive. If you want an errand, you may go over the hill to Farmer Sutton's and tell him I am ready for the promised poultry. You will enjoy that, I know; but come directly home."

At nine o'clock Ned was put to the phaëton, and the small maids started.

"We will go over by the mountain road, and come back by the turnpike, so Ned will have all the hills at the start," announced Denise as they started.

"All right," said Pokey, who usually *did* say "all right" to any proposal of Denise's.

About an hour's drive brought them to Farmer Sutton's neat farm. His big, round face beamed with pleasure when he saw them drive into the barn-yard; for Denise was a prime favorite of his, and the kind man was never so happy as when loading her phaëton with all the good things his farm would produce. So he hastened to welcome her and to bring forth his possessions, of which there was a bountiful supply; for he had a fine farm and took unusually good care of it. Soon she

looked like a vender of fruits; and as for Ned, he had eaten apples till he simply could hold no more.

Then the sleek cows had to be visited, the funny little pigs to be fed, and all the live stock inspected and talked about. All this, of course, took time; and just as Denise was beginning to think that Ned's nose should be turned homeward, Farmer Sutton said: "Now, you young ones, come right along o' me, an' let Mrs. Sutton fetch up some cold milk out 'n the spring for ye. It 's proper good milk, I tell ye, and ye 'll jist enj'y drinkin' on it"; and he led the way to the dairy.

Mrs. Sutton, a stout, pleasant woman, whose chief happiness lay in ministering to others' comforts, bustled about and soon had two glasses of icy cold milk on her dairy table.

"Now, jist ye wait one little minute, dearies, whilst I fly into the butt'ry and git a bite for ye, 'cause ye must be starvin' after yer drive in the fresh air." And away she hurried, to return with a big blue dish piled high with cookies, crullers, doughnuts, and great slices of pound-cake.

"Oh, Mrs. Sutton," cried Denise, "we

can't eat *half* that. We should n't be able to stir one step if we did!"

"Never ye mind whether ye eat it all or not. That don't matter a mite. Ye jist tuck it away in yer little go-cart out yander, and trot it along home. Children is allers hungry, 'cordin' to *my* experience."

The children labored earnestly to make Ned's homeward load lighter, and certainly succeeded to an amazing degree, if stowing a large quantity in a small space could help matters. At any rate, the cake-plate presented a far less generous appearance half an hour later.

"Now come along o' me, and let me show ye the cunningest live critter ye ever clapped yer brown and blue eyes on," said their hostess, when she felt convinced that they really could not eat any more. She led the way to the wash-house yard, and as soon as she entered it she was greeted by a funny little bleating.

"Yes, yes, Molly, I be a-comin'," said she to a tiny lamb which was tied to a little tree in the middle of the yard.

Denise and Pokey ran across the grass to see the little snowball, for certainly "Molly"

looked like nothing else. She was not more than five weeks old, and as happy and frisky as a kitten. It was funny to see her snuggle up to Mrs. Sutton, whom she seemed to consider as her mother. And, sure enough, the farmer's wife was the only mother the poor little thing had ever known, her own having been killed when she was only a few days old.

Mrs. Sutton produced a bottle of milk from her pocket, and little Miss Molly took her dinner as nicely as a baby might have done.

"Now, what do ye think o' that? Ain't it a funny baby? Why, it 's almost as much care as a baby; but it was so little and helpless that I jist could n't let it die; and it took to its meals as nat'ral as ye please. How do ye think I keep her so clean? I wash her every Monday, and stand her in the tin oven ter dry. Jist poke her in head foremost, and let her stand and warm till her wool is dry as a bone. She ain't got sense enough to turn round and come out, and we don't never let it get *too* warm. She follers me everywhere, and if I did n't keep her tied up she would git into mischief every minute."

Denise and Pokey petted and fondled the



DENISE AND POKEY PETTED THE LITTLE LAMB.



pretty little thing, and it seemed to see that they would not harm it; for it got into Pokey's lap as she sat on the grass beside it, and made itself comfortable as for a morning nap.

At last they realized that time was slipping by, and putting Molly on the grass, they bade Mrs. Sutton good-by.

But after their bountiful luncheon it was small wonder that their appetites failed to admonish them that noon was upon them, and they would barely have time to reach home before Aunt Helen's train was due.

CHAPTER VIII

AN INVITING LANE

“**L**ET 'S go down this lane a little way,” said Denise, when they were about half-way home. “I 've never been down it, and it always looks *so* inviting that I 've often wanted to go.”

“Do you think there will be time?” asked Pokey. “You know Aunt Helen said we must be back by one o'clock.”

“Oh, yes, I guess so. Let 's see what time it is, anyway. Why, where is my watch?” was the startled exclamation.

“You did n't put it on. I saw it on the bureau when I went back to get my pocket-handkerchief, just before we started.”

“Oh, me! Now we *are* in a fix. But, anyway, I guess it can't be later than twelve o'clock, and we are more than half-way home now.” And Denise turned Ned's head down the lane, much to that wise beast's disgust,

for he had not found apples particularly sustaining, and his craving for something more substantial hinted the time of day more correctly than Denise's guessing.

By way of manifesting his disapproval, he wriggled from one side of the lane to the other, leaving a perfect snake-track behind him.

"Did you *ever* see anything act as he does?" demanded Denise. "He is too exasperating to be endured. Ned Toodles, *behave* yourself!" And the whip was cracked menacingly.

A fig cared Ned for the whip. It never had caused him much fear, and he did n't believe it was going to do any great amount of harm now. So, giving two or three tantalizing jumps of defiance, he rushed into a barn-yard in which the lane suddenly terminated. Not a particularly attractive barn-yard was this, either, for it was littered with all sorts of farm paraphernalia, and simply alive with cows, chickens, ducks, dogs, and youngsters. The latter at once swarmed around the pony and carriage, and began to ask questions at the rate of forty a minute. Denise began to feel that following an invit-

ing lane was perhaps not the wisest thing she had ever done, and to wish most heartily that she had kept to the homeward road.

The eldest of the tribe, a girl of about eleven years, elected herself spokeswoman, and began to catechize the new arrivals most freely.

"Hullo, Sis! Is this yer pony yours?"

"Yes."

"Where did yer git it?"

"Papa gave him to me."

"Where did he git him? What did he have to pay fer it? Lots er cash, I 'll bet."

"I don't know what it cost," said poor Denise, trying to find some way out of the scrape and the barn-yard. Turning Ned's head, she made the attempt, but "Griselda Goose" was not to be done out of her rare treat so soon.

"Here, hold on a minute. I don't want yer ter go yet," said she, holding Ned by the bridle, while brothers and sisters crowded almost into the carriage, one taking out the pretty whip, another tugging at the linen lap-cover, another unrolling the curtain behind—in short, swarming over the whole thing like ants.

"Say, what 's yer name, anyway, and where do yer live?"

"My, don't I wish I had a little horse like that! Are yer rich? Guess yer must be, ter have such things."

Meanwhile, unhappy Pokey was growing more and more miserable, and at last turned to Denise and said desperately :

"Do for *mercy's* sake try to get away; they are just *awful*, and besides, I *know* we shall be late!"

"You *must* let me go," said the distracted Denise. "We shall be late for luncheon."

"What 's that?" asked her tormentor.

"What is *what*?"

"Why, that thing yer just said — ludgen. Is it a train?"

"No, *dinner*," said Denise, trying politely to hide her laughter.

"Oh, is *that* what yer call it? Yes, I reckon it *is* most dinner-time, for Ma she said we must all set to and git ours down right smart, for she had to go over to see Uncle Josh this afternoon. He 's been *awful* sick. See that barn down yander? Well, he 's *there*. He 's jist gittin' over smallpox. Ever had it?"

But Denise did not wait to inform her. With a slash of her whip which took Ned off all four feet and scattered the youngsters in every direction, she started out of that barn-yard at a pace which defied pursuit, and reached the main road in much less time than it had taken her to reach the farm.

But her troubles were not yet ended, for about half a mile from home she was met by John mounted on Flash, he having been despatched by Aunt Helen, who had arrived by the one-thirty train and was nearly distracted when she found that the children had not yet returned.

"Faith, wheriver have yez been to at all?" demanded he, lapsing into his richest brogue in his excitement. "It 's scared half dead yer aunt is wid the froight ye 've put her in."

"Oh, John," cried Denise, half in tears, "don't say one word, for we 've had an *awful* experience, and been near a man who has smallpox."

"Presarve us! Wheriver could ye have been at all?"

But Denise offered no explanation, and hurried home at a pace which would have scandalized her had she been less excited.

Aunt Helen's feelings can be more readily imagined than described, and no time was lost in sending John off for Dr. Swift. He soon calmed her fears, by assuring her that there could be no possible danger for the children, as both had been vaccinated that spring, and had such not been the case, no harm would have come of it, as the man was quite recovered. But the scare had done both the girls good, he said; and the kind, jolly doctor threw back his head and laughed heartily.

But never again did Denise explore inviting lanes. Public roads and broad highways were quite to her taste ever after. Nor did she leave her watch at home when going on a trip upon which it was necessary to know the difference between half-past twelve and half-past two o'clock, although it is true that she soon after got into an epidemic of scrapes which cast that one into the shade.

CHAPTER IX

HOUSE-CLEANING AND MISCHIEF

THINGS ran very smoothly for some time after Denise's exploring expedition, and the time for Mr. and Mrs. Lombard's return was near at hand.

Aunt Helen began to congratulate herself that a delightfully clear record could be reported when the commanders-in-chief should once more assume control, for, to tell the truth, she never felt quite certain as to what might turn up next, and much preferred visiting when the responsibility for the little girls rested with them instead of herself.

"I am so glad," said she to the children, as they sat at breakfast one morning, "that only one little scrape has to be reported when Papa and Mama come. It's such a comfort to have had you behave so well, dearies, and I am going to put an extra lump of sugar in each cup just by way of reward"; and she

laughingly selected the biggest two she could find in the sugar-basin.

"Here comes John with the mail now!" cried Denise. "Maybe there is a letter from Papa to tell us when they are coming"; and she flew out of the dining-room to get the letters. Whisking back again, she thrust the mail-bag into her aunt's hands, saying excitedly: "Open it quickly, Auntie, *please do.*"

"Yes, here is one from Papa, and now let's see what he has to tell us." After reading a few minutes, she said in a surprised tone:

"Why, he will be home to-night by the six-o'clock express, and will bring Captain Hamilton with him for a little visit."

"Won't Mama come too?" asked Denise, in a disappointed tone.

"No; she will stay with Grandma a week, and when she returns will bring her too."

"Oh, goody, goody! Won't that be just splendid! Will she stay long?"

"Yes, a long time, I think—perhaps all winter. But now we must set about preparing for our visitors, and have everything put in spandy order."

Little did poor Auntie dream how much "putting in order" she was destined to do

before sunset, or how easy it is to count one's chicks before they are out of the shell.

Turned loose for the morning, Pokey and Denise made straight for the Bird's Nest, and such a scouring and cleaning as was gone through with! Of course, upon so important an occasion, it had to be well swept and dusted from garret to ground floor. It was a wonder that the rugs had any fringe left on them, for Denise banged them so energetically that they flapped about like witches on a broom-handle, and her dusting-cap flew wildly off, and roosted on a neighboring tree.

After the house was in order, the dolls had to be dressed, and I grieve to relate that in being carried from the dining-room, where they had sat around the table since the night before, to the bedroom above, poor "Angelora Manuella" slipped from Pokey's arms and rolled to the bottom of the stairs, cracking her crown and shattering an arm.

"Oh, you precious, precious child!" shrieked her mother. "I *know* you are killed! Pokey, fly for Dr. Glue this instant, and fetch him with you at once, while I heat some water. You know he always wants it first thing."

Pokey rushed off to the house for the bottle

of glue which represented the doctor, and in a few minutes poor Angenora Manuella was undergoing a surgical operation.

The fortitude the dear child displayed was really beautiful to witness in one so delicately organized, for she never uttered a sound, and fell asleep the instant she was placed in her bed.

But at length the Nest was all in apple-pie order, and Pokey stood upon the threshold and breathed a sigh of relief.

"I used to think that I just hated to do any housework or to wash dishes," she observed soberly; "but I just believe I sha'n't ever mind it again. I'll shut my eyes and make believe I'm out here with you, and then it will all be fun. Don't let's touch a pin on that cushion, for they are all put in in little squares, and I believe it took me over an hour to do it."

"Now let's go look after Ned," cried Ned's energetic mistress. "What color ribbon would you tie on the harness to-day?"

"Why don't you tie rose color? You know that stands for happiness, and I guess you are glad that Mr. Papa is coming home, are n't you?"

"Just the thing. How do you ever get to

know all those things, Pokey?" asked Denise, quite impressed with Pokey's deep learning.

"Oh, I don't know. I guess I read them somewhere, and they sort of stick in some part of my brain till something makes one hop out."

So fully another hour was passed in brushing Ned's mane and braiding into it a long rose-colored ribbon. John had taught Denise how to braid it in one long braid, which ran the whole length of his neck, and ended in a little pigtail at the withers.

Then the forelock had to be parted and braided into two braids decked with ribbons, and as a suitable conclusion to his personal adornment, his tail was braided into three braids and finally looped up with a big bow of ribbon.

"Faith, he looks like a monkey!" said John, laughing.

"No, John, he does n't, either—do you, dear? It's a hot day, and he is much more comfortable without all that hair flying about, I know."

"I hope he won't go and get all mussed up," said Pokey, as she surveyed him approvingly.

"He is so black and shiny that those ribbons look just too sweet on him."

"Ned Toodles," said Denise, admonishingly, as she turned him into his day-stall and fastened the bars, "don't you go scrooching up against the sides of your stall and mussing even one end of a ribbon, or you sha'n't have any sugar for a week!"

Then the harness was decked, and when a bow was tied on the whip the effect was pronounced superb.

Noon hour struck before all was finished, and Auntie, coming out to summon them to lunch, blessed the good fairy who had put the idea of the Bird's Nest into Papa's head, as it kept the children happy and out of the way of grown-up folk who had their hands full.

"John," said she, giving him a letter, "before you return from your dinner to-day, I wish you would mail this letter for me. I want it to go out by the two-o'clock mail, without fail, so you had better go home at once."

"Very good, miss. I 'll be goin' roight off. Shall I close Ned's stable door, or will Miss Denise do it whan she goes in?"

"I 'll shut it when I go," answered Denise.

"All roight, thin; but don't be afther forgittin' it, or there 's no tellin' what that young villain will be doin' at all!"

"Don't you call Ned a villain, John. He would n't do anything bad for all the oats in the bin."

"Now, don't you be too sure of that, thin. I 'd not thrust him out of me soight." And with a good-natured laugh John left the grounds.

"Come in at once, children," said Auntie, as she returned to the house.

"We 're coming this very minute, for we 're half starved."

"Now, my little maids," said Auntie, when the famished children were sustained by a generous supply of luncheon, "you may amuse yourselves in any quiet way you choose, till it is three o'clock; and then come to me for your baths, and I 'll make you both as sweet as roses to meet Papa and Captain Hamilton."

Away went the children, and, taking Auntie at her word, chose a charming "quiet way" to amuse themselves on a hot summer afternoon.

"Let 's make some taffy," said Denise. "I have plenty of molasses in the kitchen, and we can boil it in no time."

"It will *never* get hard on such a hot day as this is," answered Pokey.

"Why, yes, it will, if we put it in cook's refrigerator," insisted Denise.

"I don't believe it, for it 's awful stuff in summer-time," said skeptical Pokey.

"Well, we 'll try, anyway"; and Denise soon had a fire sputtering in the stove and a pail of molasses bubbling on top.

"What *can* be the matter with Ned?" she exclaimed, when the smell of the boiling candy had filled the house and adjoining stable. "He is stamping about at a great rate; I just believe he smells this candy."

"I dare say; he loves sweet things like a little bear," said Pokey.

"Do go into the stable and see what he 's up to," begged Denise. "I can't leave this candy now, or it will burn."

"Indeed I sha'n't," affirmed Pokey. "He 'd roll his eyes and bounce at me."

"Now, how *could* he bounce at you, when he is fast in his stall?" demanded Denise.

"I don't believe he *is* fast; he could n't walk round so much if he was."

"Why, how in the world could he get out? His bars are up, and I don't believe even *he* is

wise enough to pull the pegs out. You stir this candy, and I'll go see, if you are afraid to."

And Denise handed over a very sticky spoon to the willing Pokey and started for the door communicating with the stable. She opened it and gave a scream, for there in the middle of the floor, and in all his goodly array of rosy ribbons, stood Master Ned, looking at her in the most tantalizing way, as though to say: "*Can't* I pull out the pegs with my teeth, and *can't* I jump over the lower bar, and *can't* I fly through this door which *you* forgot to shut after John told you to?" and with a rush and a clatter he tore out of the stable and over the lawn, flinging up his heels and tossing his head and making straight for the big gate, which unfortunately stood wide open.

Denise stood rooted to the spot for an instant, and then screaming, "Pokey, Pokey, Ned has run away!" she tore out of the stable and made after him as though she had wings to her feet.

Aunt Helen heard the uproar and rushed out just in time to witness Ned's final kick-up as he flew up the road with Denise in hot pursuit.

CHAPTER X

AN EPIDEMIC OF MISCHIEF

“**N**OW we *are* in a fix!” Aunt Helen exclaimed to Pokey, who had managed to get as far as the piazza, but had forgotten to lay down the sticky spoon, to which she still clung, as if its tenacious properties might have power to hold Ned, could she but lay it upon him. “John a mile away, and Ned in a fair way to be ten if he goes on at the rate he has started, and with no halter on to fetch him back with when he *is* caught!”

Meanwhile Ned and Denise tore on; he glorying in his freedom, and she vainly trying to overtake him. But as though the very spirit of mischief had entered into him, he made a sudden turn and headed straight for the railway station. Denise was just near enough to see him dash upon the platform, rush across it and into the station as though carrying a danger-signal to the astonished

ticket-agent, who sat in his little office, into which Ned tore full tilt, scaring the good man nearly to death.

But Master Ned found the place very like an eel-pot,—much easier to get into than out of,—and Mr. Smith was a man of prompt action, as one who might have to deal with runaway engines, whether four-footed or four-wheeled, is obliged to be. So promptly closing his office door, he had the beribboned runaway a fast prisoner.

A moment later Denise, panting and puffing like a small steam-engine, and with perspiration pouring down her face, rushed into the office; whereupon Mr. Smith sat down to laugh, and Denise, with what breath was left her for laughter, followed his example.

“Oh ” she panted, “did you *ever* know such a bad little thing as he is, to lead me such a chase? What do you mean,” she demanded, shaking Ned by his forelock braids, “by scaring me so? John said you were a little villain, and I think you just *are*.”

“How will you get him home, Miss Denise?” asked Mr. Smith. “Shall I send one of the men with you?”

“No, indeed, thank you. I don’t need any

help. I 'll get him home." And, springing up, she caught Ned by his braids, saying, "Come home this minute," and, tugging him along, she got him out of the office and started for home, with the little scamp walking as demurely beside her as though he had never done anything mischievous in his life.

That was the funniest bit of Ned's make-up. No matter how mischievous and full of pranks he might be at one moment, his weather would straightway change, and he would be as meek as possible, or else look at you in a surprised way, as if to say: "Why, you *must* be mistaken. *I* did n't do anything."

Aunt Helen and Pokey met them at the gate, and the former said: "When you have put Ned into his stall and *shut the stable door*, you had better come to me for your bath, for I fancy you feel the need of it."

Denise only waited to push Ned in his night-stall by way of punishment, and bang down the door, when she rushed into the play-house for the precious candy, which Pokey had poured into a pan. Running into the kitchen with it, she put it into cook's refrigerator, and then went up-stairs to Aunt Helen.

"Children," said Aunt Helen an hour later,

when soap, water, and clean clothes had metamorphosed the two scapegraces into two dainty little maids in white frocks, "no more mishaps to-day, I beg of you. Go out and drive quietly about in the phaëton till train-time, and then let Papa find you spandy nice."

"We will, Auntie; we truly will"; and Denise started down-stairs.

Pokey lingered to ask, "Aunt Helen, please let me fill the tub again. I do love to see the water pour in."

"Yes, you may fill it, but be careful not to get splashed," answered Aunt Helen, whose soul was filled with apprehension for unlucky Pokey.

"I 'll be careful," was the reply, as she seated herself on the edge of the tub, and started both faucets.

Meanwhile Denise was waiting in the hall below and calling to Pokey to hurry up.

"I 'm coming in just half a minute. Just wait till the tub gets full."

"There!" she exclaimed; "it 's just up to that little ring, and now I 'm going — oh!" — and, suiting the action to the word, which ended in a prolonged howl, Pokey lost her

balance and slid backward into the tub—white frock, pink sash, and all.

For an instant Aunt Helen stood speechless, too startled to know whether to laugh or scold, as the unfortunate child struggled to regain her feet.

“Elizabeth Delano!” she cried, as she stood the dripping child on the tiled floor, where the puddles could form without harming anything. “I certainly feel as though I could shake you thoroughly, for the limit of my patience is reached, I believe!”

“Oh!—oh!—oh!” gasped Pokey, nearly in tears. “I ’m so sorry, and *so* wet. I did n’t *mean* to slip so far back.”

“I believe you; and now let me get you into dry clothes just as quickly as possible.”

At the howl of anguish Denise had rushed up-stairs to find Pokey decidedly moist, for tears fell from her eyes and water dripped from her skirts, as Aunt Helen hastened to get her out of her wet garments. Denise took in the situation in an instant, and the bubbling laugh which was never far below the surface came rippling out.

“Oh, Auntie!” she cried. “Does n’t she look just like a drowned rat? Don’t cry,

Pokey ; you will soon be all dry, and Auntie won't scold very hard, will you, Auntie? 'Cause she did n't mean to."

"I would n't mind the scolding," said Pokey, "'cause I half believe I ought to get one, but I 've just gone and spoiled all the water for Aunt Helen's bath." Which remark was so perfectly characteristic of Pokey.

Another half-hour and another start. This time Auntie gave no admonitions, feeling, perhaps, that it would be best to let Fate direct things herself. Surely Fate was in a particularly tantalizing mood that day, and delighted in tormenting these little specimens of frail humanity.

Down to the porch went the two delinquents, fully determined to be model children for the remainder of the afternoon.

Mischief, however, must have been in the air, and they particularly susceptible, for the door was scarcely passed when Denise, stopping, exclaimed: "The candy, Pokey ; let's not forget that. We can take it with us and we can go up under the trees on Hillside road to eat it."

Soon the candy was produced, but in a condition far more resembling cold molasses than

candy, and as delectable a mess as two youngsters could wish for.

"I 'll tell you what we 'll do," said Denise, who was decidedly a young woman of resources and not easily discouraged. "We 'll take the pan and two spoons, and we can eat it that way."

"Won't it be awful sticky?" demurred Pokey.

"Well, never mind if it is. We won't have to touch it if we have our spoons," said Denise.

When John saw the pan of sticky stuff about to be carried into the phaëton, he expressed himself very plainly on the subject:

"Now, Miss Denise, ye know ye should n't be takin' that sticky stuff into yer little phaëton at all. Ye 'll just be sthook from yer head to yer heels wid it, and be in a foine sthate."

"No, we won't, John. We 'll be careful."

"Well, Oim much mistaken would yer aunt let ye, did she know."

But Denise did n't wait to ascertain, and giving the pan and spoons into Pokey's keeping, started off in great haste, in all her goodly array of rose-colored ribbons.

Hillside road was a delightful one ; more lane than public driveway, it wound up the mountain to a beautiful residence at the top, where lived old Colonel Franklin, one of Mr. Lombard's most intimate friends, and a great admirer of Denise, for whom he cherished a hearty friendship.

On one side of the road magnificent maple-trees cast their shadows upon a tiny rill that trickled and sang beneath them, and upon the other the ground sloped by long, gentle undulations to the river half a mile away ; giving a charming view of the Tappan Zee, which sparkled in the afternoon sunshine that shone on it and on the beautiful homes of Irvington.

It was an ideal spot to choose for an afternoon drive, and delightfully cool and quiet for a little rest when one had gone about half-way up.

Denise had an eye for the beautiful, and stopping Ned under a spreading maple just where the road was most inviting and the view simply perfect, she announced complacently to Pokey :

"Now, *this* is what I call a lovely spot, and we 'll just sit here in the phaëton and eat

our candy, and not have anybody to bother us, for people don't often come this way."

Giving Pokey one spoon, and arming herself with the other, she set a sweet example by dipping up some of the mess and eating it with a relish. Pokey followed suit, and presently about half of it had vanished. But little by little their tastes became sated with sweets, and their relish began to lessen.

"I don't believe I *can* eat any more," said Pokey. "Is n't it too sticky and sweet?"

"Well, rather," said Denise, reluctantly; "but it 's good."

Meanwhile, Master Ned had caught the scent of something eatable, and manifested a desire to share the feast, whatever it might consist of. He turned his head first to the right and then to the left, and stretched his neck nearly out of joint in his endeavors to see what it might be. He hoo-hooed, whinnied, and pawed till Denise could no longer resist his appeals. So, jumping out of the phaëton, she set the pan on the ground in front of him with the command:

"Now, Ned Toodles, you may just eat the candy in that pan, and see that you leave it perfectly clean and shiny!"

CHAPTER XI

NED DEVELOPS A TASTE FOR TAFFY

NED needed no second bidding, but at once set himself to the task most assiduously, licking and slobbering to his heart's content and his head-stall's ruination.

In about ten minutes the mess had vanished, and he raised his head, a spectacle for a tidy hostler to groan over.

Molasses and foam dripped from his mouth; his bit was literally stuck fast to it; the hair about his muzzle was beautifully plastered with taffy, and, alas for the rosy ribbons, they were so sticky that Denise had to throw them away.

His shaggy mane and forelock had been nicely sprinkled, as he tossed his head about in his vain endeavors to free himself of the sticky stuff.

Buckles and straps were well coated, and

he himself was as disreputable and rowdy a little beast as one could find anywhere; but he had enjoyed himself—oh, dear, yes!—and snorted and begged for more.

“Dear me, what *shall* we do with him?” groaned Denise.

Pokey could only look on, filled with dismay and apprehension as to what their reception at home would probably be.

“I know what I ’ll do,” exclaimed Denise. “I ’ll wash his face with the carriage robe. It’s *linen*, and lots easier to clean than the harness.”

So Denise, catching up the robe, dipped one corner of it into the brook, and then proceeded to scrub Ned till she had succeeded in getting the mess well off of him, and nicely transferred to herself.

In the midst of the operation the sound of approaching wheels caused her to glance up the hill, to behold in the distance Colonel Franklin’s elegant victoria coming down the road, with the Colonel, his wife, and daughter therein.

“Quick, quick!” she cried. “Get into the phaëton, and take care of the pan and spoons, while I drive home as fast as I can go, for

here comes the Colonel, and I would n't have him catch us in this mess for *anything*."

Bouncing into the carriage, she caught up the reins, and, turning around like a whirlwind, was soon tearing down the hill at a breakneck speed, and making a lively chase for the big horses prancing behind; for when little Ned chose to go he could get over the ground in a very lively manner.

Pokey sat breathless, holding fast to the pan and spoons; but as the chase grew livelier, she was seized with a desire to glance behind; and that one glance was their undoing; for she forgot all about the pan and spoons, and the next moment they were flying wildly out into the middle of the road.

"There! Now you *have* done it!" exclaimed Denise, petulantly, for her temper was much disturbed by thoughts of past, present, and future, and her patience was not very elastic.

Nothing could be done but go back to gather up the scattered articles, and by the time that was accomplished, Colonel Franklin was upon them.

"Good afternoon, young ladies," said he, with a courteous bow, while his wife and



“THE PAN AND SPOONS WERE FLYING WILDLY OUT INTO THE
MIDDLE OF THE ROAD.”



daughter bowed pleasantly. "You seem to be enjoying yourselves," he continued, as his twinkling eyes took in the situation. "May I ask if this is a private picnic in which Mr. Toodles is an honored guest, and has had the lion's share of the sweets?"

Poor Denise was covered with confusion, and scarcely knew how to reply; but catching sight of the funny side of the predicament, she burst out laughing, and was joined very heartily by all.

"Did you *ever* see such a looking thing as he is?" she demanded. "He likes taffy altogether too well, and oh, me! what a mess he has made of himself; and what Aunt Helen will say when we get home, I just don't know. I don't suppose we shall ever hear the last of it, do you, Colonel Franklin?" she added slyly.

"No; I 'm afraid you never will." And she never did; for years after the Colonel would ask: "Well, Miss Denise, do you still make taffy?" But, at the time, he added cheerily:

"Don't you think we had better act as escort, Miss Denise? I fear Ned's liberal supply of liquid taffy has rather unsettled him,

and he seems to be in a very rowdy frame of mind."

So the big carriage and the little one rolled along, side by side, till the home road was reached. There they parted, with the Colonel's assurance that he had never been in *sweeter* society.

"How *could* we act so?" said Denise, remorsefully, when the Colonel's carriage had passed on. "I 'm just as sorry as I can be, and I 'm going straight to Auntie to tell her so. I would n't blame her if she shut us up in a little box for the rest of the afternoon, for we 've done nothing but plague her ever since luncheon."

Soon they were at the front door, a very different party from the one that had left it an hour earlier. John was in a most righteous rage when he was summoned to take Ned back to the stable, and he gave vent to his wrath in smothered Celtic as he led the pony away.

And well he might be angry, for Ned was the pride of the devoted creature's heart, and the time and care he lavished upon the little scamp no one ever guessed.

"Faith, I belave the Ould Bye himsilf has

got into the childer to-day!" John muttered, shaking his head.

Pokey remained on the lawn to swing in the hammock while Denise went in search of Auntie to confess her misdeeds to that much-enduring woman.

She found her just ready to descend to the porch for an hour's rest before the train should arrive, but Auntie promptly learned that "the best-laid plans o' mice and women" can be upset by — well — taffy, ponies, and small children.

Nothing could be done but to return to her room and get the sticky youngster restored to a proper condition; and it is small wonder that Auntie's patience came near giving out, or that Denise should get a decided lecture.

"I am more annoyed than I can tell you, Denise. How you *could* have been so thoughtless and selfish to-day, I can't understand."

"Selfish?" echoed Denise, in a tone of surprise. "Have I been *selfish*, Aunt Helen?"

"Yes, I am sure the word will apply to the case, for you have taken no pains to make my duties lighter, when you could not fail to know that I had a great deal to think of in this big house, now that Mama is absent and

I must assume the entire responsibility. Then, too, you knew a guest was coming and that I wished to have all in proper order for his comfort, and that I must get Papa's room ready, as well. All this made extra work for Mary, who must now set to work and clean this candy off your dress, besides having Pokey's to dry and iron just when she is at her busiest.

"So you see that, instead of trying to be thoughtful for others and making as little trouble as possible, you have gone on from one prank to another, till now the climax is reached. John must work this evening to get Ned tidy. I have had to dress you again, just when I was ready to sit down and rest after a fatiguing day, and Mary must work too. It is trying for us all."

"But I could n't help it if Pokey got upset, could I? — and was n't it just too funny for anything?" and, in spite of her aunt's rebuke, up bubbled a little laugh at the recollection.

"No, dear, I'm not blaming you for Pokey's mishaps," was the answer; "but I want my little niece to be more careful of her own conduct, and by so doing to help Pokey overcome her blundering ways."

"Can I, Auntie? I never thought of that."

"Yes, dear, you can do a great deal toward it, for you know Pokey loves you dearly, and admires you as well as loves you. She has not such a happy home as yours, nor is she taught as carefully as you are. Nothing helps us so much as good influences and a wise example. We may not realize it at the time, but the impression is just as strong, and, unconsciously, grows with us.

"Some day when you are grown, and look back upon this dear home life, you will understand what I mean, and be so grateful to dear Papa and Mama for giving you such a happy girlhood, and teaching you in such a sweet way. There, darling, my little lecture is ended, and I don't believe we shall need another for some time, shall we?"

"No, Auntie, we won't. We *truly* won't!" and she clasped her arms around the kind aunt who never *scolded*, no matter how strong the provocation might be.

Just then, the train's whistle told them that in a few moments Papa would be with them, and both hurried down to the piazza, where Pokey joined them.

Soon Denise was gathered into a pair of

arms which held her close, while their owner said :

“How has my darling little daughter been getting along without us all this time?”

“We have missed you dreadfully,” was the reply, “and if it had n’t been for Pokey and Ned we never could have endured it! I want to see Mama so badly that I don’t know how I can wait a week longer.”

“She sends you ninety-nine kisses by me, and I shall have to give them on the instalment plan; so here are ten to begin with; after dinner you may have some more.”

CHAPTER XII

CAPTAIN HAMILTON'S PLAN

“**W**ELL, little Miss Muggins,” said the Captain, when they were all seated at dinner, “how are the children flourishing, and what is this I hear about a remarkable play-house? I’ve not been out here in such a long time that I’m quite in the dark regarding the important events of the family. Will you take me out for a visit after dinner?”

“Indeed I will,” answered Denise, with alacrity, “and Pokey will show you how fast Ned and Tan have learned to run; won’t you, Pokey?”

Pokey very promptly turned the tables by answering: “Yes, if you will tell them how fond of taffy Ned has become, and how nicely he can pull out pegs.”

Naturally these mysterious remarks had to be explained, which caused a hearty laugh all

round, and effectually dispelled any sign of clouds which might have remained.

As soon as dinner was finished all strolled out to the Bird's Nest, where the children displayed their treasures and explained their exceptional merits.

Sailor and Beauty seemed to think that they must assist in doing the honors, so while one tore around, the other paraded about with his great plummy tail waving like a banner, and his big soft eyes showing the affection he could not speak.

Then all the pets were visited in turn, from Ned down to the twenty-seven bunnies, whose house stood in an adjoining field. These little bobtails demanded no small amount of care, you may well guess, for there were "fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins; families by tens and dozens," of all sizes and ages.

"What in the world do you ever intend doing with all these pussies?" asked the Captain. "Are n't Hero and Leander enough in that line, with just half a dozen here for company?"

"Hero" and "Leander" were Denise's cats, and had been so named by Papa, who had rescued them from a watery grave when they were wee kittens.

"Captain Hamilton," said Denise, impressively, "I wish I could answer that question, but I can't."

"You have roused a vexed question, Captain, for she won't hear of one of those bunnies being sent to Bunny Land, and if the family continues to increase for the next two years as it has in the past, we shall have to buy a ten-acre field to keep it in," said Mr. Lombard.

"Eh, is that true? Why, the matter is serious; but it 's lucky we spoke of it, for I 've a fine idea, which I 've borrowed from George, and if you will just sit down here on the grass beside me, I 'll tell you in two minutes," said the good-natured Captain, who had a family of eight boys far away across the sea in England, and was only too glad to have a chat with little people for the sake of his own at home.

So the party settled themselves on the soft lawn in front of the Bird's Nest, the children snuggling close to the Captain, and listening eagerly.

"You see, George had some rabbits given him about three years since, and as we 'd only a place about fifteen feet square in which to keep them, in the course of time he found

himself very like the old woman who lived in a shoe. What to do with his big family he did n't know. However, about three weeks before I sailed, some garden truck was brought to Mrs. Hamilton by a farmer who lived a little way back in the country, and one of his boys happened to come along with him. I give you my word, that boy went nearly wild over George's rabbits, and George's mother suggested that some should be given him.

"So the bargain was struck in this way: four bunnies were to be given to each boy, providing he would promise the best of care for them, and, as there were four boys, that disposed of sixteen bunnies.

"They were put into a big box, and away they went with the farmer's lad, George going along too, that he might be sure they had good, comfortable quarters, although he would have to walk all the way back home, and it was a good six miles, too. But he never cared a rap for that.

"When he got home in the afternoon he was as muddy a young tramp as you could wish for, but as happy as possible; and so were we," he added, in conclusion.

"Was n't that splendid!" cried Denise, clapping her hands. "Papa, do you suppose Farmer Sutton's boys would like some of my bunnies?"

"I 'm sure they would be overjoyed to have them," said her father, heartily and with charming decision.

"Do you truly? Well, I 've a plan. John is to harness Sunshine to the garden cart, and drive Pokey and me and some bunnies over there to-morrow morning. May he?"

"Don't you think you will find it rather rough riding?"

"Oh, no; we sha'n't mind it, shall we, Pokey? It will be fun."

Pokey seemed to think that the jolts would add to the novelty, and permission was given with delightful promptness, and John was told to have everything ready by nine o'clock.

Never did he receive a more gratifying order, for the bunnies were beginning to seem like a millstone about his neck.

When the pets' territory had been left behind, and the children had gone for a romp with Sailor and Beauty, Mr. Lombard said:

"Captain, I feel called upon to offer a vote of thanks, for you have proved yourself a

public benefactor and capable of solving a deep problem."

"Never you mind the problems. Let the lads and lasses have their good times and be happy with their pets. It's good training for them against the time they grow up and have pets that they can't send off to the neighbors to be looked after, and it will make them all the more affectionate and patient. But I can't see them grieved, and if a little manœuvering can save a tear, let's have the manœuver, say I."

Next day the bunnies were sent off. Pokey and Denise perched beside John in the garden cart, which went jiggerty-jog, jiggerty-jog, as Sunshine trotted along.

Never was a jollier ride, for they sang songs all the way over, and John told stories of Ireland and its jaunting-cars, while the children hung their feet over the sides of the cart and played they were going to Dublin.

Surely the road was rocky enough to suggest it, and it was a wonder that they were not shaken to bits on the way.

No need to tell how happy the boys were to get the pretty rabbits. In an hour's time they had built a nice house for them in a big

orchard near the house, and the bunnies were well settled in new quarters and seemed quite at home.

"We 're jist powerful obleeged to ye," said the old farmer; "and them boys won't git a wink o' sleep to-night fer thinkin' on them rabbits. Reckon ye need n't worrit about their bein' fed reg'lar. They 'll be stuffed like geese. Now come along and let me fill that thar cart, and then ye can play ye 're farmers goin' ter markit."

Soon the cart was filled with all sorts of good things, for Dame Sutton had a private supply of her own for the children, and there was no danger of famine.

"Don't you want to go down this lane a little way?" asked Pokey, slyly, when they were returning home.

"No; I 'd rather stop and gather button-balls for walnuts," said Denise, laughing, for Pokey's last achievement had been to gather a half-bushel of these balls, supposing them to be walnuts, and to lug them home in triumph, only to be laughed at for expecting to find walnuts in August.

"I don't care if you all did laugh at me. I 'm going to make something pretty of them

for Christmas. "See if I don't," said Pokey, nodding her head wisely.

And the clever child actually did make an exceedingly pretty hanging basket by stringing the balls on wires, and lining her basket with gray moss.

Ferns were to be had for the digging, and when Pokey returned to town two weeks later, she carried with her a pretty souvenir which suggested her country visit long after the visit had ended and the snow had buried the other ferns and buttonballs.

CHAPTER XIII

PATSY MURPHY

WHY is it that the good times slip by so quickly and the tiresome ones drag? Can some one answer that question?

Hardly had the joy of Mama's return and Grandma's arrival subsided, than it was time for Pokey to return to her home and begin her lessons; for she went to a school which opened its doors the first Monday in September, even if the days were hotter than when it had closed them in June.

So poor Pokey had to tear herself away from her delightful frolics with Denise and "the children," and to prepare to stew her poor brains till little hint of the roses she had found in the country remained to tell the story of fresh breezes and sunshine.

For a time Denise was utterly forlorn, and even the pets failed to console her. The

weather was still very warm, and her studies would not begin till the 1st of October, when Miss Meredith would return.

And in the interval she hardly knew how to occupy herself, for the Bird's Nest seemed lonely and dull without its second chirper, and Denise dreaded to go into it and find there no happy-go-lucky little body who was always amiability personified and ready with some splendid plan for a new play. For Pokey read to some purpose, and had no end of pleasant ideas stored away in her wise little noddle.

So Denise tried to console herself with long rides on Ned. John had taught her to ride, and Ned was perfectly trained for the saddle. Such delightful rambles and races; for Ned could pace, canter, or run as the turn of the bridle or position of the whip indicated to him, and was equally delightful in any gait.

And so they would swing along in the sunshine, or under the big trees; Denise singing or talking to him, and he tossing his head as though he understood perfectly.

Often she would lean forward and clasp both arms around his warm, soft neck, lay her face in his shaggy mane, and let him walk

whither he would. And how the dear little fellow enjoyed his petting! Never did an animal display greater reciprocity of affection, or prove more plainly that to him Denise was the dearest being in the world.

One warm, dusty morning, Denise and Ned were going along a path which ran close by the river, when they suddenly came upon a little urchin known to the town as Patsy Murphy, the dirtiest, most harum-scarum little ragamuffin the place produced.

Perched upon a rock close to the water's edge, he sat "skipping" stones into the river as if life held no greater pleasure.

Barefooted, his trousers in rags and tatters and held up by one suspender, which had doubtless originally belonged to his father; a gingham shirt guiltless of a button and held together by an old brass safety-pin; his red hair cropped short to avoid the trouble of combing, and his elfish little freckled face artistically streaked with dirt and perspiration, he was a fair specimen of the spirit of mischief.

Ned stopped and regarded him as a curiosity, while Denise gazed upon him with mingled disgust and amusement.

"Tip o' the day to ye, Miss Denise," said Patsy, unabashed.

"How do you do?" was the reply.

"Is it how I do, ye 'r' axin'? Well, I 'm jist afther scuttlin' out av the school, an' nary a bit will I set me fut insoid it this day."

"I should think you would be ashamed to say so, when you know your mother wants you to learn something. *She* works hard enough, I 'm sure!"—reprovingly.

"L'arn su'thin', is it? Don't I *know* su'thin' alriddy? Whisht now, whilst I tell ye what I l'arnt the day. T'acher she axed me had I tin apples an' Johnny Doyle five, how many more would I have thin Johnny? An' I told her *fifteen*, bekase I 'd moighty soon swipe Johnny's an' roon wid 'em."

Denise felt that Patsy's arithmetic was a little beyond her, so she ignored the last remark, and said severely: "I don't see how you *can* get so dirty. You are just not fit to be seen. A great boy nine years old, with *such* a dirty face."

"Is me face dirty?"—innocently. "Now howiver c'u'd I know that when the lookin'-glass is broke? An' listen whilst I tell ye a sacret." And hopping off his rock, he came



PATSY.

close to Denise and said in a confidential tone :

“D’ ye know when I got out av me bed this marnin’, I said I ’d *wash me face*, an’ I wint to git the bowl. But what do ye think me mither says? Says she, ‘Patsy, don’t ye be takin’ that bowl. I ’m jist afther cl’anin’ it ter make *bread* in.’ Now, do ye mind, I could n’t be clane fur thot r’ason?” said the incorrigible.

“I never saw such a boy in my life!” exclaimed Denise, gathering up her reins; and she went on, leaving Patsy glorying over his victory.

Could she have seen him after the turn in the road hid him from her sight, her peace of mind would doubtless have been even more exercised, for, giving his ragged scrap of a hat a toss, he proceeded to execute a dance of triumph by turning handsprings over the sand.

Following the pretty path along the shore, Denise soon reached a road which led abruptly up the bank and brought one to a little country store—one of those stores in which a miscellaneous collection of articles is sold, a place patronized by people who did

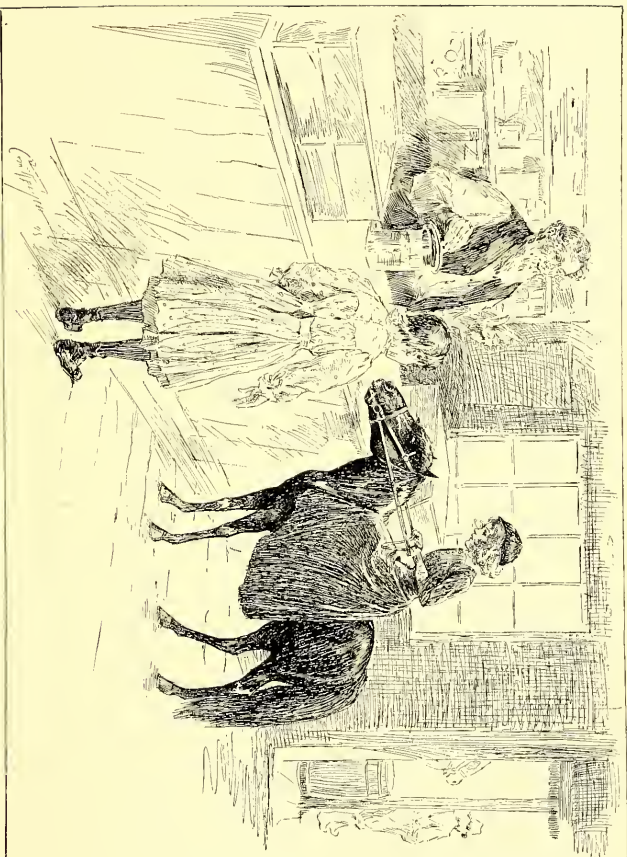
not care to walk to the village when a spool of thread, a pound of sugar, or a fish-line was needed.

For several very good reasons, Ned had a strong fancy for this particular store. First, only three steps needed to be climbed to enter it, and those gave him no trouble whatever. Next, chocolate creams were sold there, and he was very fond of them.

And last, but by no means least, Mr. Jones, the storekeeper, thought it a great joke to have him come pattering in with Denise on his back, walk up to the counter, and whinny for cream-drops.

So you may be sure that he needed no urging when once he found himself headed in the direction of the store, and he scrambled up the steep hill as though the impish Patsy were in hot pursuit. Faster and faster he walked; then he broke into a trot; and, at last, finding that he was not restrained by word or rein, he broke into a brisk canter which soon brought him to the object of his desire.

Denise let him have his own way, so, making straight for the entrance, he scrambled up the steps, clattered across the little stoop, and bounced into the store.



“NED REACHED OUT AND GRABBED THE CANDY.”

Two or three steps brought him to the counter where the cream-drops were kept, and a loud neigh made known his wants to Mr. Jones, who had just laid a stick of peppermint candy upon the counter for a little girl, who, doing her best to produce a penny from an atom of a pocket, was so absorbed by the struggle that she paid no attention to the queer customer who had just entered.

But to Ned the temptation was too great, and in just about half a second he had reached out and grabbed the candy.

The sudden move caused the child to look up, just in time to catch sight of the end of a pink-and-white stick vanishing in a black mouth.

It had all happened so quickly that Denise was helpless, and it was so funny that she could not help laughing when she discovered it.

But the defrauded child did not see it in a funny light at all, and lifting up her voice, she howled dismally.


"Oh, don't cry!" said Denise. "I'll buy some more candy. And you must n't blame Ned, for he thought Mr. Jones had put the stick there for him. Did n't you, you little scamp?" she asked, pulling his mane.

Soon more candy was produced, and Little Forlornity was sent on her way rejoicing over ten cents' worth of chocolate creams, while Ned was made happy with his allowance of five, and was quite ready to turn his inquisitive nose toward home when the word was given.

"You *are* a bad little scrap," said Denise, as he clattered out of the store, "and if you don't behave better, I 'm afraid you won't get any birthday present, and in a few weeks you will have a birthday, you know. At least *I* shall, and it 's all the same. So you 'd better behave!"

CHAPTER XIV

BIRTHDAY PLANS

“NLY think, Mama; in three weeks I shall have had Ned one whole year. It seems to me as though I 'd always had him,” said Denise, one morning, as she sat in her mother’s pleasant room.

“Do you think, darling, that you ever enjoyed a year as well?” asked her mother.

“No; I ’m sure I never did. Of course I loved Sailor and Beauty and Tan, but I don’t think any one could love a goat or a dog as well as they could love such a dear little wise pony as Ned is. Do you?”

“Hardly. But don’t you think we ought to have a frolic to celebrate Ned’s anniversary, and let him share in it?”

“Oh, Mama, *can* we? Would n’t it be fun! What could we do?”

“I think we can have the frolic, dear, for there is just the hint of a shade of an idea in

my head this very minute; and if my darling little daughter will come and sit on the arm of my big chair while I sit here to rest, I would not wonder if it took form and shape."

"Moddie, Moddie, Moddie! Whatever should I do without you?" said Denise, snuggling close to her mother. "Now I 'm all ready to hear 'the hint of a shade.'"

So, cheek to cheek, they talked it over, and three weeks later it carried happiness to five other children, lads and lasses.

"Let me see," said Mama. "The 10th falls on Saturday. How would it be to have Pokey come out on Friday afternoon and stay with us till Monday morning? On your birthday we could invite May, Murray, Harry, and Tom, and all go off on a grand nutting-party. We can go to Sheppard's Brook; and Papa, Miss Meredith, John, and I could go in the surrey and make ourselves generally useful.

"You could take the depot-wagon, and divide up the rides as the fancy took you. The boys won't mind the walk in the least; but if they should suddenly grow weary," — and Mama smiled suggestively, — "you girls

could do a little walking without taking any harm."

"Of course we could; and would n't it be perfectly splendid!"

"John can drive us," continued Mama, "and when we reach there he can be general utility-man, looking after Ned and Sunshine, getting out the lunch-baskets, and climbing the trees if they prove too much for the boys. What do you think of my plan, dear?"

"Mama," said Denise, solemnly, "what *do* you suppose girls do who have n't mothers that think out lovely plans for them? I don't see how I'm ever going to pay back all you do for me." And she looked seriously burdened with her obligations.

"Put the speaking-tube to my lips, so that no one else can hear, and I'll tell you how to cancel your obligations," said Mama, smiling.

Denise laughed, and pushing back her long brown curls, put her soft ear close to her mother's lips.

"By being a thoughtful, obedient, unselfish little gentlewoman," was whispered in the speaking-tube.

"I will, Moddie, indeed I will; for I don't

see how a girl could be anything else when she has such a precious Moddie!" cried Denise, kissing her mother tenderly.

Denise was delighted, and consequently the letter was written to Pokey that very day, and as quickly as the mail could bring it the reply came to state that Pokey would accept with pleasure.

Between that and the time set for Pokey's arrival, Denise spent most of her time in hunting up all the baskets and bags to be had, and in telling Ned over and over again that he was to go on a nutting frolic on his birthday.

On the 29th Miss Meredith returned, and on the 1st of October the studies began again, and helped the time pass more quickly till Pokey should come.

Denise had an active little brain, which made it a pleasure to teach her, so she and Miss Meredith got on capitally. Moreover, Miss Meredith was a born teacher, and helped the bright little mind she had in her care to unfold as naturally as a flower. No matter how prosy the subject might be, she possessed the rare faculty of turning it into a fairy tale, and she had oftener to say, "We will keep

the rest for another day” than “Let us finish this to-day.”

Lessons were always ended at one o'clock, and all the beautiful autumn afternoons Denise was free to follow the bent of her fancies, while Miss Meredith enjoyed her rest and the society of Grandma and Mama.

And Denise had plenty to occupy the afternoons, for she had undertaken to teach Ned the tricks she had seen a circus pony perform, and the *modus operandi* was funny enough. John, naturally, was general factotum, and entered into the spirit of the thing with a zest; for he firmly believed that Ned was the “intelligentest baste” that ever lived, and it was simply a question of telling him what to do, and he would do it at once.

The first move was to make a ring about sixty feet in circumference out in the dismantled vegetable garden; and the next to take a big box, five feet long, three wide, and one foot high, and fasten a large block of wood at the left-hand corner — a block about fifteen inches high. Beside this was a post about ten inches higher.

Then the whole thing must be covered with one of Flash's old blankets, carefully cut and

tacked on, so that Ned need not slip, and his pedestal was complete.

An old carriage rug laid in the center of the ring served as kneeling-mat, and then they were ready to begin.

And I can assure you that it took many days and much patience before Ned was pronounced perfect and fit for a public performance. First he had to be taught to go around the ring by himself, and one after the other the various tricks were learned; but we will tell of these at another time.

The 9th came very quickly, and Denise was in a perfect fever of excitement. Long before the train was due she was at the depot, driving up and down to keep little Ned from taking cold in his head, for the days were growing frosty, and by four o'clock one felt grateful for a snug jacket.

But at last the whistle sounded, and in a moment more the train had deposited Miss Pokey and Papa upon the platform.

Presently the little depot-wagon had all it could hold, for Papa and the big satchel filled the back seat, and the two chatter-boxes occupied the front, as Ned whisked them away.



"IT TOOK MANY DAYS AND MUCH PATIENCE BEFORE NED WAS
PRONOUNCED PERFECT."

"Did you bring an old dress and jacket?" was the first question.

"Yes; and old shoes too, for Mama said I'd be sure to need them."

"I feel sure you *will*, and I'll let you have my boating-cap, and then you will be all fixed out."

"Oh, won't it be fun!" cried Pokey, with a bounce, as if already jumping up after the falling nuts. "Is n't it splendid to be out here again and sniff the fresh air?"

"Are n't you afraid of Ned's bouncing now?" asked Papa.

"No, indeed, I'm not. He can bounce all he wants to, for if he spills us we shall tumble on the soft grass beside the road, and not on the old city *stones*," replied Pokey, rather recklessly.

"Papa, *do* you think the day will be fine?"

"Made to order," was the reassuring reply. "Just look at old Sol taking himself off to bed behind the mountain. Tell me, did you ever see the old fellow looking jollier?"

CHAPTER XV

POKEY HAS A DREAM

“**I** KNOW I sha’n’t sleep one wink to-night,” said Pokey, as the children settled themselves in bed at an early hour, in order to be up betimes in the morning.

“Yes, you will, too. You ’ll just go right off to the Land o’ Nod, as you always do, and leave me talking to the darkness.”

“I sha’n’t, either. Don’t you suppose I want to talk just as much as you do? Only you know Mrs. Mama said we were not to talk *too* long, or we should n’t be able to wake up early enough in the morning.”

“Well, we won’t talk too long; but how many bags do you guess we shall gather to-morrow?”

“Twenty^{*}, at least,” was the wise reply; for Pokey’s nutting expeditions had been few and

far between, and her ideas on the subject were decidedly vague.

"Well, I know that we sha'n't,"—positively. "Why, if we get *six* it will be a lot."

"Six! I believe I could gather six all by myself. Are the bags as big as my satchel?"

"As big as your satchel! Why, Pokey Delano, they are empty flour-sacks, and hold just heaps and heaps!"

"Oh, I thought they were little bags!" And Pokey subsided to think over the prospect of filling six flour-sacks.

Ten minutes passed without a word from either, and then Denise asked suddenly:

"Pokey, are you going to sleep?"

"No!"—promptly. "I am just as wide awake as you are, and am lying still to think about the fun we will have to-morrow. I never went on a real nutting-party before, and I know this one will be just splendid!"

"Of course it will. Everything Mama thinks out is splendid. There never was a better mother than mine, I believe."

"No; I don't believe there ever was," agreed Pokey. "How do you suppose she ever thinks of so many lovely things?"

"I asked her once," replied Denise, "and

what do you suppose she told me? She said that way down in one corner of her heart was a little spot that was all mine, and nobody else ever got into that particular spot, not even Papa, for there was another place that was his. Well, in my little spot lived two tiny fairies; one was the play fairy, and the other one was the wise fairy. The wise fairy kept telling her just what was best for my comfort, and how to take care of me and make me grow up a sweet little gentlewoman. The play fairy put all the bright ideas into her head, so that I might have the happiest childhood imaginable, and that would help the wise fairy's work, because if I was happy and merry all the time it would be much easier for the wise fairy to make me grow up just as she would like to have me.

"So when Mama wants some extra nice idea she just goes off and has a quiet little talk with her play fairy, who has never failed to help her when she wants a new idea for a frolic.

"Then, you see, the wise fairy is happy too, for she knows that the pleasant time is my reward for trying to be what *she* wishes me to be."

"I think that is as sweet as any fairy story I ever read. I wish *my* mama had some fairies too," said Pokey.

Then both lapsed into silence, one to think sweet thoughts of a mother whose whole life was dedicated to her little daughter's physical, mental, and moral welfare and happiness, and the other to wonder wherein the difference in her own and her little friend's life lay, feeling it, but quite incapable of defining it. Sober thoughts for little people, and not conducive to insomnia.

In what, to Denise, seemed about ten minutes, she started up, realizing that she must have dozed off. Her first thought was:

"I wonder if Pokey caught me going to sleep? How she will laugh at me, if she did!"

"Pokey,"—softly.

No answer.

"Pokey!"—a little louder.

Still silence, broken only by Beauty Buttons, who slept on a rug at the foot of the bed, and roused up enough to wag his tail.

By this time Denise was wide awake, and, reaching over to shake the sleeping Pokey, was scared nearly out of her wits to find the bed empty.

"Mercy me! where *is* she?" cried the startled child, and bouncing out of bed, she rushed to turn up the gas. There were Pokey's clothes upon the chair where she had placed them upon retiring, but no sign of their owner could be seen.

Meanwhile Beauty, who seemed to think it a good joke, had jumped up from his rug and ran about the room, wagging his tail and acting altogether like a crazy dog.

"Catch them! Catch them! Don't you see that they are all running away?" was shouted in muffled tones from beneath the bed. And then came a bang and a scream, as Pokey wakened from her dream of hunting in the leaves for nuts, to find herself under an iron bedstead, against which she was bumping her head in her sleepy endeavors to get out.

As soon as the true state of affairs had dawned upon Denise, her scare vanished, and seating herself in the middle of the floor, she laughed until she could n't laugh any more.

In came Mama to learn what upon earth had happened, and to find Pokey seated upon the edge of the bed trying to rub the sleep

out of her eyes, and Denise rolled up in a little heap in the middle of the rug.

"You crazy children! What *are* you doing at *this* hour of the night?"

"Oh, Mama, is n't it just too funny?" And Denise went off into another fit of laughing.

"Why, you see," explained Pokey, "I dreamed that we were 'way off in a field, picking up nuts, and at the edge of the field was a steep bank, and all the nuts were rolling away down it. So I went down to catch them, and I guess I must have crawled out of the bed instead, for I don't see anything like a nut—unless it is this lump on the top of my head," she added ruefully, as she rubbed a big bump.

Mama could not help joining in the laughter; and after fetching a healing lotion and binding up Pokey's bruises, she tucked the children safely in bed, and with a good-night kiss for each, said:

"Now go straight to sleep, and don't think of another nut till daylight, for it is nearly two o'clock."

"Two o'clock!" echoed Denise, "and I thought I'd been asleep only ten minutes!"

According to Denise's method of reckoning

time, another ten minutes had scarcely passed when she was awakened by a bright ray of sunshine falling across her face.

“Wake up, Pokey; wake up this minute!” she shouted to the sleepy little mortal beside her, who gradually uncurled herself.

“Oh, dear! I don’t believe it ’s morning yet, and you are waking me up to laugh at me,” was the sleepy reply.

“No, I ’m not, either. Just look at the sunshine, when you ’ve got the sandman out of your eyes, and you ’ll see that it *is* morning. So hurry up, or we sha’n’t finish breakfast before the others get here.”

Such a glorious October morning! It was just crisp and frosty enough to make one feel frisky, and you may be sure that no time was lost in getting ready for breakfast.

Soon the children ran out of their room, one to receive a cheery good-morning greeting from the family, and the other tender birthday wishes and many pretty gifts; for even John remembered the little girl who occasionally made life a burden to him, and brought as his offering a beautiful pot of white chrysanthemums which he had watched and tended for months.

CHAPTER XVI

A NUTTING-PARTY

“**E**LEVEN years old to-day,” said Denise, in a sober voice, as she sat at the breakfast-table. “Just think; I’ve been in this world eleven whole years! Mama, how did you ever get on before I came? You must have been very lonely; were n’t you?”

“Do you think you are so essential to my happiness, little Miss Conceit?” asked her mother, jokingly.

“Well, yes; I guess that I *am*, rather,” said Denise, positively, “for you once said that Papa was the sun and I the sunbeams in your life, and people are dull without those, are n’t they?”

“Yes, darling, we need both, and I keep mine very close at hand,” said Mama, with a smile and happy glance from sunny little daughter to kind husband.

“Papa,” cried Denise, a moment later,—for her busy tongue must keep going when the brain had so many thoughts pressing forward,—“I wonder how old Ned is; do you know?”

“Yes; I think I can tell you that pampered young creature’s age; for when I bought him, one year ago, he was seven years old.”

“Why, he is only *eight* now! I thought he must surely be as old as I.”

“No, indeed. He would be getting pretty well on, even for a Welsh pony, if he were eleven.”

Before breakfast was finished, shouts and voices outside announced the arrival of the lads and lasses who were to complete the party, and Denise and Pokey rushed out to welcome them.

Presently all were gathered out on the lawn to watch the bestowal in the sallery of some very comfortable-looking baskets and packages, as well as ropes, bags, and little baskets for the pickers.

Ned, harnessed to the depot-wagon, was quite as important as any member of the party, and did his share by carrying his own and Sunshine’s dinner, halters, and blankets.

In less time than one would have thought it possible to get such a lively party in order, the whole van was on the way, the girls singing, and the boys romping and tearing about as only boys can. Although it was three miles to Sheppard's Brook Farm, the distance was traveled in no time.

Ned seemed to consider it a party made up especially for him, and acted altogether like a little scalawag—tearing along on a dead run as the boys ran beside him, scrambling up the hills with the boys helping by pushing, and then rushing down the other side as though determined to break his neck. But the little Welshman was too sure-footed to be easily upset, and bounced along like a goat.

Sailor and Beauty were permitted to join the party; but poor Tan had been compelled to remain behind, although he blaated most piteously when he saw them start off without him.

As soon as the big fields in which the great shellbarks grew were reached, John unharnessed Ned and turned him loose, and blanket-ing Sunshine, fastened him to a neighboring tree. For Sunshine, although three times as big, was not nearly so wise as little Ned, and

would soon have gone prancing off if left to himself. But Ned was very sociable, and still more curious, therefore he never got out of sight of anything unusual, and Denise's whistle could summon him in an instant. So while he amused himself by poking his inquisitive little nose into every corner of the field, the two-legged picnickers fell to work with a will, and soon had the nuts flying in all directions.

Never was day so lovely. Never were nuts so big and plentiful. In no time the baskets were filled and emptied into the big sacks and ready to be filled again.

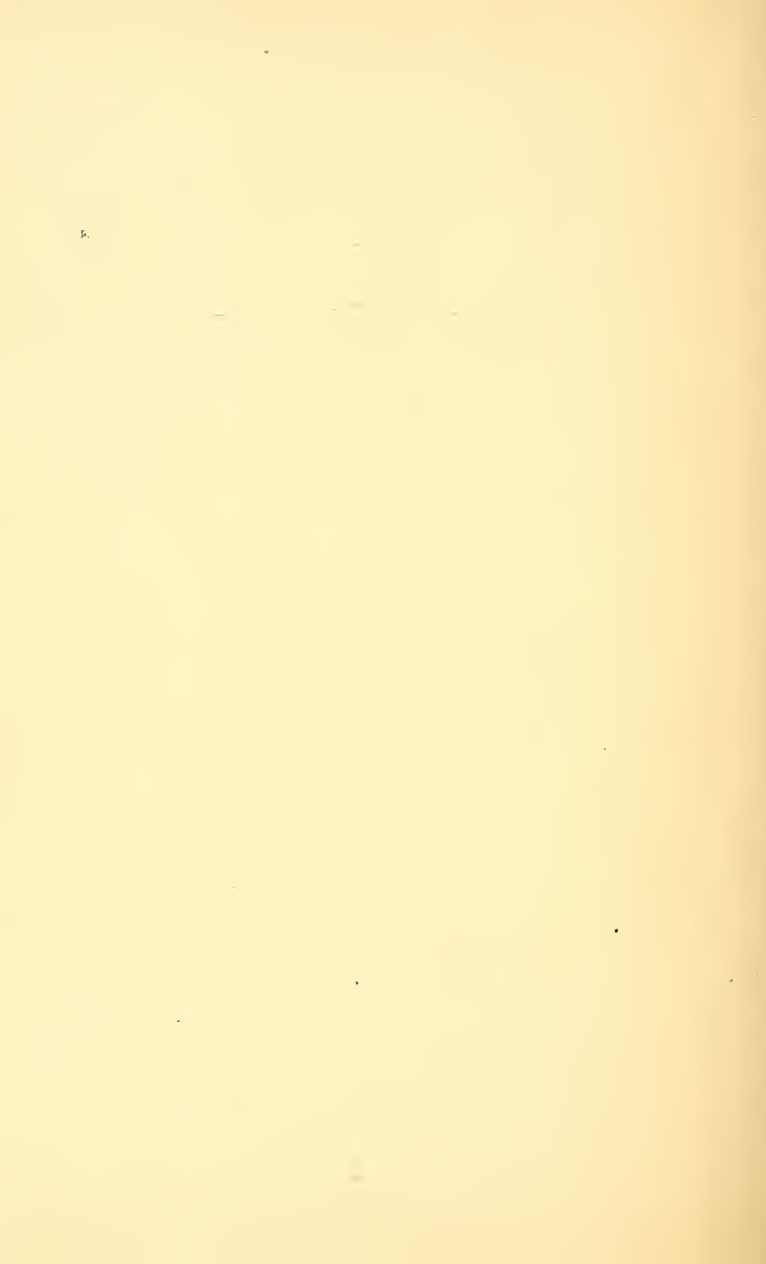
All joined in, and while John and the boys thrashed the trees with long, limber poles, raining nuts on anybody who happened to be beneath, the others gathered till their bended backs ached.

By one o'clock all were ready for a good, substantial lunch, and Mama and Miss Meredith proceeded to set it forth.

I should n't dare tell of the quantity of food consumed that day. But who would not be hungry after three hours' lively exercise in the delightful October sunshine and air? All sat or sprawled about on the warm, dry grass, and ate or drank at their own sweet wills.



THE BIRTHDAY PARTY IN THE WOODS.



Nobody minded an interruption in the shape of Ned marching into the middle of the table-cloth to search for sugar, or Sailor and Beauty making a foraging expedition for sandwiches.

After luncheon came a grand rest for an hour, during which all talked or various members of the party told stories.

"Papa," said Denise, "I am just as old to-day as you were when you had your first coat-tails. Do tell us the story again. It was so funny."

"Oh, yes; do, do!" cried all the others.

Papa laughed, and began:

"When I was a lad I lived in a little town on Cape Cod, called Truro. We were a long way from Boston, and there were no railroads in those days to carry us back and forth. But we did not miss them, because we had never known what it was to have such things, and were well satisfied to have everything brought down from Boston by packets, as the boats sailing between Truro and Boston were called.

"My mother, brother, and myself lived in a big house which stood high on a hill, and from it we could watch for the coming of the packet, and also for my father's ship; for he was a sea-captain, and used to sail on long

voyages which often kept him from home a year or more at a time.

“Father had sailed from home in March, and when he left us he said to me: ‘Now, my boy, when I get back in September you will be eleven years old; and if I get good reports of you in Mother’s letters I shall bring with me your first coat-tails, at the end of a jacket with brass buttons.’

“‘And long trousers, too?’ I asked, for it was the fashion in those days for boys to wear short jackets and breeches until they were about ten or eleven, and then they could dress like their fathers; and you may be sure the first coat-tails were longed for with as much eagerness as the first long trousers are to-day,” said Papa, with a nod at the lads before him.

“‘Yes; the trousers too, all complete, on one condition,’ said he.

“‘And what is that?’ I asked eagerly.

“‘That you keep Mother’s wood-box well filled,’ was the answer.

“That seemed an easy thing to do, and so I promised very readily.

“So Father sailed, and I counted the days which must pass before August, when I should be eleven years old.

“Meanwhile the wood-box was kept filled, and Mother’s reports were good.

“At last, August 7, my birthday came, and Mother wrote a letter to Father which would reach him in Boston, where he was expected to arrive the 1st of September. She gave him my measure, and nothing remained but to keep my impatience bottled up till the 1st of September, when he should be at home.

“He came four days sooner than we expected him, and the new suit with him. I tell you it was superb! It was dark-green cloth, and had satin facings and gilt buttons. Then there was a stock and frilled shirt, just like Father’s, and the hat and shoes to complete it all.

“You may be sure I lost no time in getting into it, and it was pronounced simply stunning.

“Father’s arrival was a great event in the family, and that evening all the aunts, uncles, and cousins came to tea to welcome him, and the best parlor was made ready and a rousing fire built in the big open Franklin stove.

“My logs of wood snapped and sparkled, and we youngsters had great fun roasting apples and chestnuts in front of them.

"I, in my swell suit, was the 'biggest toad in the puddle,' and paraded up and down before the admiring eyes of the other children. At last, growing conscious of the tight new shoes, I chose a novel place in which to rest myself and relieve my feet of the burden of my body. I sat down on the fender of the Franklin, and was so absorbed in caring for my weary feet that I utterly forgot that I was the owner of *coat-tails*, and left them to take care of themselves.

"Pretty soon Mother turned round and said excitedly:

"'I smell wool burning. What on earth is it?' and then she caught sight of me.

"'Lewis Lombard! Are you stark mad? Your whole back is afire!'

"I sprang up, but the coat-tails remained behind — a charred, blackened heap. Mother tore off what remained of the coat, and the danger was soon over; but I was the most unhappy boy in Truro that night, and have never heard the last of my first coat-tails to this day," said Papa, as he finished the story amid shouts of laughter from the children.

After the laugh had subsided, Papa said it was high time to attack the chestnut-trees in

the adjoining field, and all fell to work again with a will.

By four o'clock six big bags had been filled with chestnuts and hickory-nuts, with a few hazels thrown in for variety, and the members of the nutting-party were glad to prepare for the homeward ride, leaving the bags to the care of the farm-hands, who promised to take them over the mountain early Monday morning.

So Ned and Sunshine were harnessed, and while John went to the farm-house to thank Mr. Sheppard for his hospitality and the nuts, Papa packed away the belongings and collected his party.

Such a jolly, tired crowd as walked, rode, or "cut behind," as they went over the mountain toward supper and bed, which all felt would be welcome !

But, alas ! Pokey had to prove that "there 's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip."

CHAPTER XVII

POKEY TRIES TO STUDY BOTANY

THE road wound up the mountain, in and out, up and down, sometimes through deep woods, and then down into little valleys, where a brook trickled beneath thick ferns which nearly hid it from view, and in many such spots it was decidedly boggy.

The summit of the mountain was gained and the descent begun when just such a spot was reached.

Pokey was walking, and, as usual, was considerably behind all the others, when she was seized with a desire to gather a beautiful wild flower which grew a little way in the woods.

Never stopping to consider the wisdom of the step, or ask a question, she stepped straight off the road, and found herself up to her knees in a bog which the ferns had wholly concealed.

Her screams caused the occupants of the surrey — which by this time had gotten well ahead — to turn round and behold Pokey floundering about and getting deeper and deeper every instant. In about half a minute John had her on firm ground, but a spectacle to behold.

Frightened as they were, the children could not help shouting at the forlorn object before them, for certainly poor Pokey was as muddy a little girl as one could conceive of.

“Ugh!” she exclaimed. “I feel just like a frog, and I do believe I should have gone right down to China if John had n’t fished me out!”

Soaking and muddy, she was rolled in Sunshine’s blanket and put into the surrey, to be driven home as quickly as possible, while John remained behind to look after the rest of the party, and finish his homeward journey on foot.

By the time they reached home Pokey had been *scraped*, and was ready to welcome them with her imperturbable good nature.

Soon the baskets and various traps were disposed of, Ned led off to the stable, the “good nights” said, and the extra members

of the party departed, singing at the top of their lungs:

“Miss Pokey wanted a posy, oh!
Heigh-ho, Miss Pokey!
And after it she had to go,
And *souse* into the bog—oh! oh!
Up to her knees she went, you know,
And John he pulled her out just so.
Heigh-ho, Miss Pokey!”

to the tune of “A Frog He Would A-wooing Go.”

“Pokey,” asked Denise, a few hours later, when the family was seated around the cheerful log fire, “what do you think you will dream of to-night?”

“*Nothing*, I hope!” was the quick reply, “for if I did, I’m afraid it would be about getting stuck in bogs.”

“I trust that your dream might not be as real as one my brother once had,” said Mama.

“Do tell about it,” begged Pokey, who dearly loved a fireside tale.

“It was a great many years ago, when I was a young girl. Charley and I used to go every summer to spend a few weeks with Grandfather, who lived on a large farm in the central part of New York State.

“It was an immense place, and he had any number of horses, cows, and all sorts of farm stock.

“One afternoon Charley and I had been rambling through the fields, when we came to a large pasture, where a beautiful Holstein bull was feeding. We looked at him over the bars, but kept at a respectful distance, as we did not know what manner of beastie he might be. Charley was much struck with him, and but for me would have gone straight into the field.

“When we got home we asked Grandfather about him, and he told us that he was a very valuable animal, but not an amiable one, and for that very reason he kept him in that distant pasture and behind a stout paling, and it was lucky for Charley that he had stopped outside.

“No more was thought of it; but that night, at about two o'clock, I was wakened by something falling upon the floor in front of my door.

“I jumped out of bed, and looked out in the hall, but failed to discover the cause.

“It was a beautiful moonlight night, but the hall was dark. I slipped back to my

room and lighted my candle, for I felt sure something must be wrong."

"What was it — thieves?" asked Pokey, breathlessly.

"No," said Mama, laughing; "only a *shoe*. There it lay in the hall. But in an instant it flashed upon me that it was Charley's.

"Then I knew what the matter was. He was walking in his sleep, as he sometimes did at home. Rushing back to my room, I scrambled on my shoes and stockings and some clothes, and then flew to Grandfather's door, crying: 'Grandfather! Grandfather! Wake up, quick! Charley is walking in his sleep.' In about two minutes, which seemed two hours to me, Grandfather came out of his room, dressed in trousers, dressing-gown, and slippers, and off we started — down-stairs to the lower floor, where we found the kitchen door wide open, which told us he had gone that way; and out on the grass lay his sock, where he had dropped it.

"In one second it came upon me that Charley had gone off to see his Holstein bull, for we had come home by the fields and across this very lawn; and my heart nearly stood still when I thought of it.

"I told my fears to Grandfather, who said: 'Bless us and save us! I hope not. That beast is not a pleasant creature in the day-time, let alone at night.'

"The moonlight shone brightly, and it was almost as light as day as we approached the pasture.

"On the ground at our feet lay a white object, which proved to be Charley's handkerchief, and left us no doubt as to his errand. The next instant we beheld a sight which simply held us spellbound. The whole pasture lay plainly before us, bathed in the clear moonlight; and flying across it, with the great bull in hot pursuit, was Charley, barefooted, in his night-shirt and *hat*.

"Never before had he gone at such a rate of speed, and how he ever managed to fly over the ground as he did that night we never could guess.

"But the bull gained upon him at every step, and but for a very miracle he must have been killed. At the critical moment his hat flew off, almost into the animal's face, which he seemed to resent as an open insult; so turning his wrath upon that, he stopped to stamp it into shreds. That was just enough

to save Charley, for he reached the paling, flung himself over it and into a ditch at the farther side. There he lay, too frightened to move, for until he had stepped into a puddle of water while in the field he had not been aware of his terrible danger. That awakened him, and he then fled for his life.


“When we got to him he was the most startled boy you ever heard of, and although sixteen years old, and a stout, big fellow, he was as weak and shaky as a little kitten.”

“Oh,” said Pokey, when the tale ended, “I believe I should have gone dead right off! Did he ever walk in his sleep again?”

“Yes, many times, but never after that got into such a scrape. And now, off to bed, but *no* dreams!”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE "CHAPEL"

S though Dame Nature had a tender spot in her heart for the city child who so rarely had an opportunity of enjoying the lovely things she had ready to show her, Sunday was, if possible, even more delightful a day than Saturday had been.

It was one of those still, dreamy days that come to us about the middle of October, when Nature seems resting from her work of the past months, when she has been so busy making and bringing her works to perfection. It was a yellow, mellow day, steeped in a rich golden haze which hung over mountains, river, and valley, and made the Tarrytown hills beautifully soft in outline.

The Tappan Zee lay like a mirror, which plainly reflected the various craft idly floating upon it. Scarcely a breath of air stirred, and

indeed a perfect Sabbath stillness rested upon all things.

"I don't see how any one *could* do or think a bad thing to-day," said Denise, as she and Pokey walked home from Sunday-school at eleven o'clock.

"It seems to me," she continued, "that on such a perfect day as this everybody ought to feel thankful to be alive, and I guess God sends such days to make us try all the harder to be good"—for she was quick to feel the beautiful, and benefit by it.

"I wish I lived in the country," said little Pokey, wistfully. "Sometimes I get so hungry for a piece of it that I don't know how to live without it. I just feel as though I could run away, and never see the city again."

"I wish you did live here," answered Denise, heartily. "Would n't we have gay times? Never mind; you must come just as often as ever you can, and have half of all my nice times and good things. You know, it's a great deal nicer if some one goes halves."

"I should think I did go halves now. Why, I come so often, and get so many pretty things every time, that Mama says I'd better live here altogether. I wonder why it

is you are all so nice to me," said Pokey, innocently, wholly unconscious of her many winsome qualities and of the affectionate nature that endeared her to all.

"Why, we are nice to you because we all love you; and Mama says that if we would always remember to 'do unto others as we would be done by,' we would never be unhappy, and could make everybody happy too."

"I wish you would ask Mr. Papa to go up to the Chapel this afternoon. I do so love to go there. It is so quiet and sort of peaceful that it makes me feel good all over, and as though I never could get cross any more."

"Of course I will. It is so warm that it will be just lovely there this afternoon, and I guess Mama and Miss Meredith will go too. We will take a nice book, and ask Miss Meredith to read aloud. She is so kind that she never minds reading a bit, and her voice is so soft and sweet that it's just like little bells."

The "Chapel" was a charming spot about a third of the way up the mountain, just where the open fields ended and the dense woods began. From it an uninterrupted view

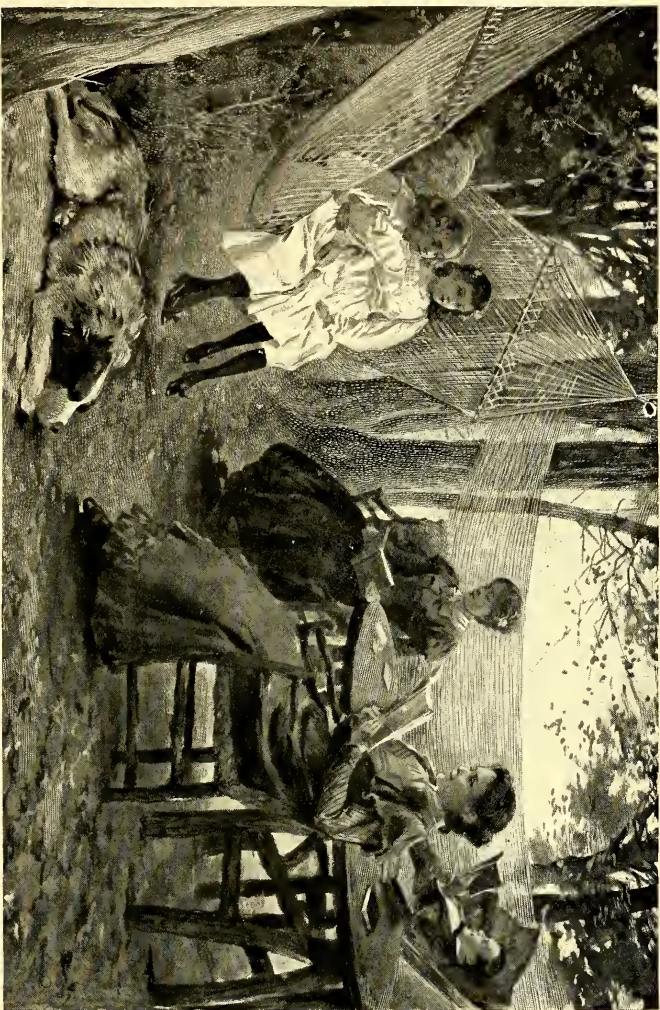
of miles lay before one, for the brushwood had been cut away, and the great forest-trees formed a lovely framework for the picture.

Just within the wood rustic seats and tables had been made, hammocks swung, and cozy nests constructed of moss and branches, so that almost anybody could be comfortably bestowed.

Prettily carved around the top of the big rustic table, which formed the very central point of the Chapel, was the quotation: "The woods were God's first temples." A delightfully cool, restful spot in which to spend a quiet Sabbath afternoon, after the hurry and cares of the week, and an excellent place in which to lay wise plans for the coming one.

Nearly every Sunday afternoon, when the weather permitted, the family betook themselves thither to read, write letters, talk, dream, or drowse, as the fancy prompted. No wonder that Pokey, whose brain was so wearied with weeks of helter-skelter study that she did n't know whether nine times nine were eighty-one or eight hundred, longed for this peaceful spot.

So, directly dinner was ended, all armed themselves with climbing-staffs and started



IN THE CHAPEL.

for the Chapel, Tan, Ned, Sailor, and Beauty following or leading, as the notion took them; for they always went with the rest, and needed no leaders, being only too ready to go with their beloved little mistress to the very ends of the earth, should her fancy lead her that way.

Pokey stood in respectful awe of Denise's children, and kept close beside Miss Meredith, who laughingly said it was the book she carried which made Pokey so devoted to her.

It did not take long to reach the Chapel, and once there, Sailor and Beauty stretched themselves on the dry, warm earth for a snooze; but Ned and Tan thought it better fun to poke about in the woods, one to eat leaves and bark, and the other to nibble daintily at the straggling wood-grasses.

After much plumping and arranging of pillows,—with which each had come so well provided that a neighbor who saw them start asked if they were playing at "Pilgrim's Progress," like Miss Alcott's heroines,—all settled down for a luxurious rest.

"Now, Miss Meredith, please turn Ichabod Crane loose, and let him roam about hill and

dale; for this is an ideal spot for him, and Pokey looks as though she were positively suffering in her impatience to meet him," said Mama, when all were comfortably settled, she in one big chair, and Miss Meredith in another, with plenty of cushions to make them comfortable. Papa stretched in one hammock, Pokey and Denise swinging in another.

So Miss Meredith began: "In the bosom of one of those spacious coves which indent the eastern shore of the Hudson," — and soon had carried her good friends straight across the glassy river and into the Sleepy Hollow which could be seen so plainly from their lovely outlook.

Pokey sat breathless, lost to everything but Ichabod and his pursuer, till the tale was ended, and then said in a serious way which convulsed her hearers:

"Did they ever catch the real Hessian? I don't mean the pumpkin one."

"They had n't done so at last reports," answered Papa, "and I should n't wonder if he was still on the rampage."

"Let's have a swing," said Denise, presently, after Pokey had digested and pondered over Papa's reply; for she had sat still as long

as it was possible for her, and longed for some motion to act as safety-valve. "You sit still, and I'll get the hammock swinging real high, and then sit in it as it swings back, just as I've seen Papa step into a rowboat after he pushes it off."

This being successfully accomplished, they enjoyed a swing of about five minutes, when "the old cat" began to "die," and the operation had to be repeated.

Denise had served her turn four or five times, when Pokey thought it only right that she should supply the motive power, and said to Denise:

"Now you sit still this time, and I'll give you a good one."

"Take care you don't make it too good, and spill us both out."

"Now don't you suppose I can do it just as well as you can, when I've seen you do it four times?" demanded Pokey.

"Well, be careful, anyhow," was the warning given.

Up she hopped, and soon had the hammock swinging at a wild rate; but, alas! Pokey's idea of philosophy, natural science, the center of gravity, or whatever it is that

keeps hammocks right side up, was not as keen as Denise's. Instead of getting into the hammock as it swung *backward*, she stood stock-still, back to it, as it swung *forward*, and then, jumping up, tried to sit in it as it swung *under* her. Unfortunately, not having eyes in the back of her head, she could not gage the distance correctly, and instead of sitting *into* it, she sat completely *over* it, thereby instantly turning it bottom side up, and landing herself and Denise in such a promiscuous heap that it was difficult to tell their heads from their feet when Papa rushed to the rescue.

"Oh, Denise, Denise! are you dead?" came in imploring accents from one part of the heap.

Denise was not dead, by any means, only decidedly mussed and shaken up by the sudden somersault.

Tan had been so startled by the spectacle that he jumped about a foot straight up into the air, and then stood with ears and tail erect, and blaated like a distracted thing; Ned stampeded to a safe distance, and then stood regarding such frivolous conduct in a way which clearly indicated his disgust; while

Sailor and Beauty barked as though set upon by thieves, and it rested with them to rouse the town.

Peace was restored, however, and then it was decided that the homeward walk must be begun, for the afternoon was beginning to tell that an October evening was nearly upon them.

Monday morning carried Pokey back to town, consoled only by the thought that at least a bushel of nuts would speedily follow her, and that she was already invited for the Christmas holidays.

CHAPTER XIX

ANXIOUS HOURS



FEW days after Pokey's departure, Denise, coming into her mother's room after an afternoon's ramble on Ned, found her lying upon her couch and complaining of headache.

"Poor Moddie! let me sit here and smooth the ache away," said she, crawling up to the top of the couch, and taking her mother's head in her lap. "See; I'll smooth all the little knotty kinks out, and then the ache will go away."

But even the gentle touch failed to dispel the ache, which seemed to grow worse as evening approached; and although Denise had sat "pooring" for more than an hour, Mama's eyes grew duller and duller, and the poor head throbbed the harder.

At last she fell into a restless sleep, and, placing her comfortably upon the pillows,

Denise went in search of Grandma, filled with an indefinable sort of anxiety, as of something distressing about to come upon her.

Going into her grandmother's room, she said: "Grandma, won't you come and look at Mama? I am afraid she is quite ill, for I 've been with her more than an hour, and she does n't seem a bit like herself."

Instantly Grandma was ready to follow, and she and Denise went quickly back to Mama's room.

By this time a decided change had taken place, and Grandma noticed with serious alarm that, although apparently asleep, the sleep was far from being a restful one, and Mama had a high fever. Not wishing to frighten Denise, she said: "I wish, dearie, you would step down and ask John to saddle Flash and go for Dr. Swift. Such a severe headache as Mama's ought to be relieved at once."

Noiselessly Denise flew down the stairs, and in a few moments John had started; for the good man was always ready to speed at the need of the mistress to whom he, as well as the other servants, was sincerely attached.

Meanwhile Denise had gone to her room to put on her softest slippers, and then returned to Mama, whom Grandma and Mary were already preparing for her bed. Denise flitted about, arranging the pillows, filling the hot-water bags, and helping like any little nurse; for she had a wise little head on her frisky body, and her love for her mother seemed to suggest the things which would make her most comfortable. John was not long in fetching Dr. Swift, who looked very serious as he put question after question to Grandma.

Denise stood by with an anxious little face, seeming to beg an encouraging word; but none came, and Dr. Swift took his departure, after ordering perfect quiet and careful attention to his directions.

As he was about to get into his carriage, Denise caught his hand, and said: "Dr. Swift, *please* tell me if Mama is going to be very sick."

"That is more than I can say, little girl; but you must trust to Dr. Swift to bring her through safely, if the good Lord will let him," said the kind doctor, with a pat on Denise's upturned face.

When Papa returned at six o'clock he took

ANXIOUS HOURS.



matters in hand at once, and a telegram was soon speeding on its way to Aunt Helen, asking her to come immediately, and fetch with her a trained nurse.

At midnight Denise was wakened by Auntie's kiss, and putting up her arms, she hugged her close, and begged her to take good care of Mama.

Auntie needed no urging, and at once the care of the household fell to her share, while Grandma and the nurse devoted themselves to the invalid.

The next morning all realized how ill she was, and for many days the doctor came and went without being able to give much encouragement, or conquer the obstinate fever, which was doing its best to change Mama into a mere shadow.

To Denise the days seemed the longest she had ever known; for she tried to be brave and to keep her fears to herself, lest she give an added care to those who already had so many.

It seemed to her as though she lived in a sort of nightmare, and could not get awake. The house was very still, the parlors and library deserted, and even the door-bell was silenced, for a maid anticipated every ring,

and gave word of the invalid's condition to the many who came with kind inquiries or offers of assistance.

Gentle Miss Meredith had not the heart to force the lessons, for she saw very plainly that Denise's mind was too much tossed about to study, and so she determined to let the tasks wait, and meanwhile try to help the unhappy child by reading with her such books as might help her forget, and yet would put new ideas in the little head, which later would profit thereby.

Strange as it may seem, Ned was her best consoler during these dark days. She had no heart to ride or drive him, but would go off and sit on the ground under the trees, with Ned cuddling beside her like a huge dog, and with his head held close in her lap she would talk to him as though he were a human creature and could understand all she said.

Many a bitter tear fell upon his shaggy mane as Denise held him close and sobbed out her grief.

Sitting thus on one of the soft October afternoons when all was so still, she said: "Little Toodledums, do you know how sick

Mama is? God did n't give you a voice to speak with, but I know you *think* and *love*, and maybe you know more than I do, after all."

A soft neigh answered her, and accepting it as a reply, she continued: "Toodledums, Mama may go away from us, and never come back any more, and whatever, *ever* should we do without her? Do animals have any way of asking God to help them? Can't you tell me, when you know I love you so dearly? I don't think he would put creatures in this big lovely world, and not let them tell him how much they loved him and enjoyed being here. So if you *can* do so, you must ask him to make Mama well again."

The soft brown eyes looked at her with almost human intelligence, and it was small wonder that the little girl, who loved her pet so dearly, should be tempted to believe that between him and his Creator there should be some power of communication of which we human creatures know naught.

Just then the doctor's carriage came to the door, and she flew to hear the report he had to give on his return from the sick-room. He stayed longer than usual, and when he came

out said to Mr. Lombard: "Yes, you may telegraph for Dr. Burton, for I believe a consultation to be best."

Neither noticed the little girl behind the screen, but directly the doctor had gone she came out, and taking her father's hand, said, "Papa, is Mama worse?" and hid her face in his coat.

Her father gathered her in his arms, saying: "We fear so, little one, and to-night must decide it all for us."

She made no sound, but her quivering body told her anguish.

The house knew no rest that night, for at ten o'clock the great doctor came from town, and he and Dr. Swift talked long and earnestly.

The hours crept slowly on, and the house was so still that Denise could plainly hear the great hall clock ticking, and now and again a low moan that nearly broke her heart. Curled up on the couch in Mama's sitting-room, she fell into a restless sleep, and dreamed that she and her mother were sailing down a swift river whose waters were inky black, and the boat was obliged to pass between high banks which were so narrow that she could almost

touch them, but so high and steep that it was impossible to climb them. Upon their tops were queer creatures with animals' heads, which seemed trying to reach down and drag her mother from the boat as it sped by, yet were not quite able to reach her. She clasped her arms tightly around her, and cried out: "No, no; you *cannot* go from me!" and with the cry wakened to find Aunt Helen standing beside her and saying: "Come, Denise, and speak to Mama."

CHAPTER XX

AN HOUR OF ANGUISH

WITHOUT a word she took Aunt Helen's hand, and, as if still in a dream, passed into her mother's room. Going to the bedside, she knelt beside it, and taking the poor, thin hand in her own, laid her cheek upon it.

No sound came from the sufferer, and it seemed as though she had already passed beyond the care of those who stood or sat so silently beside her. The gentle, white-capped nurse sat waving a fan softly back and forth, while the doctors and Mr. Lombard stood watching every breath.

In the absolute silence every sound seemed intensified.

Then a strange thing happened. High and clear on the soft night air came little Ned's loud neigh, just as he called to Denise whenever he saw her in the distance.

Whether he was wide awake and called her, or had whinnied in his dreams, no one ever knew, but the call was unmistakable, and Denise almost started to her feet. As she did so her mother slowly opened her eyes, and seeing Denise, whispered: "Yes, darling: Ned is calling to us to come for a drive; we will soon be ready." And with a smile she turned her head and fell into her first refreshing sleep.

Papa left the room, for it was impossible for him to control his feelings; but Denise never stirred, and not until three o'clock had struck could they induce her to leave the bedside.

No one attempted to send her to bed, and going down-stairs, she said to John, who had sat in the hall throughout all the long, anxious night: "John, did you hear Ned call to me?"

"Faith, I did, thin, Miss Denise; and the holy saints be blessed, for a good omen it is when a horse whinnies afther midnight, and the dear missis will be gettin' better soon," said he, crossing himself.

"John, I want you to take me to Ned; I want to see him." And the kind-hearted John never hesitated an instant, but led her

out to the Bird's Nest, and unlocking the door, lighted the gas.

A big brown eye was peeping at them through the slot in the door, and a soft whinnying was saying good morning as Ned wondered why he was receiving such an early visit.

Denise did not say a word, but putting her arms about his neck, hugged him close when John led him into the play-house.

Piling her rugs and cushions on the floor, she sat down, and made him lie down beside her.

Being but half awake, he was quite ready to snuggle down, and with his head in her lap was soon fast asleep.

John went back to the house to tell them where Denise was, and when Mr. Lombard came out twenty minutes later to take her in to bed, he found her fast asleep on her cushions, with her little pet held tightly in her arms.

"Did iver ye see the loike of that, soor?" asked John.

"No, John, I never did; and through all her sad trial Ned has proved her greatest comfort, and I would not disturb them now

for their weight in gold. She is utterly worn out."

The next sunshine brought good news for all; for the fever had broken, and the dear invalid was certainly going to get better.

But many days had to pass before the lost strength was regained, and meantime everybody was anxious to do something for the beloved mother. Denise's lessons had been resumed, and all went as usual in the mornings; but the afternoons were devoted to the "precious Moddie"—more than ever precious since she had so nearly slipped from them. So many letters to be read and kind messages to be delivered!

Scarcely a day had passed without some word from Pokey, who nearly grieved herself to death. Next to her own people, Pokey probably loved "Mrs. Mama" better than any one else in the world, and no one realized how keenly the poor child suffered in her anxiety.

Her joy on receiving the good news had been unbounded, and Pokey could now study in earnest; for it had been impossible for her to give her attention to school or anything else.

The second week in November Mama

began to get about once more, and great was the rejoicing when she again took her place at the head of the table. Denise would have invited all the lads and lasses she knew to help celebrate the great event, but Mama said they had better wait for Thanksgiving, which would soon be upon them.

"Papa," asked Denise, a few weeks later, when November had fairly set in, and had been selfish enough to destroy all the lovely tints displayed by "Brown, October & Co.," "are you going to live in the city again this winter?"

"No, little maid, I think not, unless *you* would prefer doing so."

"Well, I just guess *not*. It was hard enough to go last year, when Ned was spandy new, and I had no Bird's Nest; but I just believe I'd die *dead* if I had to go *this* year."

"You need not prepare to 'die dead' yet, then, for I look forward to a cozy winter beneath my own 'roof-tree,' and the carving of my own gobbler at Thanksgiving; and this year it must be indeed Thanksgiving, for surely we never had greater cause to be thankful," answered Papa, with a glance toward Mama, who sat reading close by.

“Is that a hint for me?” asked Mama, who was now rapidly getting back her strength and beginning to be her cheerful self once more.

“I should n’t wonder, for I ’m already whetting my appetite for something extra nice *this* Thanksgiving, having been cheated out of it last,” answered Papa.

“You shall have it, for now that I am growing so strong, Denise is going to help get up the feast, and you shall see what a skilful little cook the Bird’s Nest cooking-school has made her.”

“Good! I ’ll prepare myself for something extra plummy a week from Thursday, and shall put myself on short rations, meanwhile, in order to be in prime condition to enjoy it.”

CHAPTER XXI

THANKSGIVING

IN about a week Denise and her mother were deep in the mysteries of mince-pies and plum-cake, each in a mob-cap and big apron, and each determined that such a Thanksgiving dinner should never before have been heard of as the one then under preparation.

Such pies and cakes and jellies as were set away in the store-room the days before Thanksgiving! No wonder Denise said that she made pies all day and dreamed pies all night.

Thanksgiving eve began with a heavy snow-storm; for winter came early that year, and Ned's coat foretold that it would be a long and cold one.

Such a shaggy little beast had replaced the smooth, silky one of the summer that Denise could hardly believe it to be the same Ned in

his winter dress. He looked more like a little black bear than anything else, for his hair had grown fully two inches long, and stood out all over him in such a soft fluff that his harness was nearly buried out of sight in it.

But Thanksgiving dawned clear and cold, and brought with it the aunts, uncles, and cousins from town, all ready for a grand frolic.

As soon as the greetings were over, the older folks settled down for a genuine Thanksgiving "reminis." But the boys and Denise had livelier ideas. As soon as rubber boots could be pulled on, and warm coats and hats put upon the wriggly bodies, they tore out to the Bird's Nest for Ned.

In short order they had him harnessed to Denise's sled, and away he went, tearing around the grounds with first one boy and then another, apparently enjoying himself as much as any other lad.

So long as they raced beside him, or flopped down breakneck fashion on the sled bobbing behind him, he was entirely ready to oblige them by supplying the motive power; but let them unharness him, and try to get upon his *back*, and they found themselves at an impromptu circus.

He would stand perfectly still till he had them safely upon *his* feet, and off their *own*, and then — look out !

Nothing could be more unsuspecting than his manner of *starting*, but in one little fleeting instant his whole attitude would change, and off he would go like a shot, rushing ahead as hard as he could pelt for about sixty yards, to stop as quick as a flash, and send both hind legs straight up into the air, and his luckless rider shooting over his head like a rocket.

By the time they had picked themselves up, Ned had assumed a most innocent expression, and would look around as though saying: "Why, what is the matter? Did anything happen?"

Time and again did this performance take place, and no *boy* was ever known to *stick on*, though any girl in the place might ride him for hours, and find him gentle as a lamb.

But Ned's aversion for boys in general was very marked, although the reason therefor was never learned by Denise. Probably he retained in his wise little head a memory of treatment at their hands which was not to be forgiven, and consequently took advantage of every opportunity to pay off old scores.



SLEIGHING ON THANKSGIVING DAY.

No wonder appetites were whetted by such a lively morning skirmish, and Papa's gobbler would have quaked if cook's care had not already put him beyond all quaking.

It was a rosy, bright-eyed, and laughing party which sat down to discuss his various tender points at two o'clock. The boys could not say enough in praise of Denise's culinary ability, when they learned that she had had a finger in the preparation of the Thanksgiving feast and the Thanksgiving pies.

"By jolly! I don't know which you do best, drive or cook," said Dick, when he had been helped to mince-pie for the third time.

"This cake is just prime," added Fred, as a particularly plummy bit slipped out of sight.

"Then you approve of our combination Cooking and Equestrian School, boys?" asked Mama.

"I just guess we *do*!" answered all three in a breath; and Rob cut in with: "It's immense to find a girl that can do all sorts of things. I don't know of another one who can take a horse's harness all to pieces and put it together again without buckling the crupper fast to the head-stall, and then turn

round the next minute and make such a jolly plum-cake as this."

Poor Denise was so embarrassed that she knew not what to say or where to look; for she idolized her big cousins, and felt that the very height of bliss was obtained when they fell to praising her so wildly. But you may be sure she liked it, and felt amply repaid for many burns and mishaps which had been her lot during the past summer.

After the boys had disposed of every crumb it was possible for them to hold, all made ready for the Thanksgiving dance, which was to begin at seven and end at eleven o'clock; for Mama and Papa were old-fashioned, and believed in early hours.

Denise was as sweet and dainty as a flower, in soft, pale-blue nun's-veiling.

Soon "the party came in," and the big parlors were pervaded with boys and girls, each bent upon doing him or herself credit, no matter what came.

So all danced or played games till nine o'clock, when a loud knock at the door caused all to look toward it, and in walked a Pilgrim father.

Over one shoulder he carried a gun, upon



THE THANKSGIVING PARTY.

the other was slung an immense turkey with wings and tail flapping, while from beneath the lid of a huge basket which he carried upon his arm peeped forth all the good things imaginable.

Surely it could be none other than Miles Standish, dressed as of old, and come back to tell them tales of long ago, when Massachusetts was a wild enough place, and food not so plentiful as his ample supply would lead one to believe; and certainly the tempting boxes of bonbons which he kept taking out of his basket and giving to the children were things utterly unheard of in his day.


The children flocked around him, and listened eagerly as tale after tale was told.

An hour soon slipped by, and then this Pilgrim father did that which would have caused his ancestors to fall down in a spasm. He actually led the Virginia reel, and skipped down through the long line of boys and girls as though a near relative of St. Vitus himself.

Then came a jolly farewell to stir them up and prepare them for the next merrymaking, which Christmas would soon bring them.

CHAPTER XXII

POKEY COMES TO SPEND CHRISTMAS

S though but one touch was required to complete the lovely birthday gift and make the year now drawing to its close the happiest Denise had ever known, the snow seemed to have given it by putting into Papa's head a charming idea for Christmas.

Mama and Grandma were taken into the secret, and for days the most mysterious bits of work were hustled out of sight on Denise's approach, and many whispers caused her curiosity to mount to fever pitch.

"But then," as she said, "I don't mind being poked into corners and told not to ask questions at Christmas-time. It's part of the fun, and I like not to know a thing until the very day."

Then, too, she had her own little secrets, for some pretty gift must be made for each

member of the family, and the work all her own. "A gift that I just go and buy with the money Papa gives me I don't think is my gift at all. Anybody could do *that*. I want to work some *love* into it."

But Christmas would not be Christmas without her beloved Pokey to chatter to and share the fun with, so once more she was borrowed from her city home, only too glad to go where so hearty a welcome awaited her, for no one could help loving Pokey.

Therefore it came to pass that Pokey was again upon the festive scene to help celebrate, and to join in the farewell of this *long story* of a *short* horse—for I think it high time that little Mr. Ned and his mistress were bidden good-by.

"Little daughter mine, there will be a nearly three weeks' holiday this year for you, as Christmas falls upon Wednesday, and Pokey will surely have the Monday and Tuesday previous. So we will have her out on Monday afternoon"; and Mama kissed the happy little face as she tied the hat-ribbons under the chin.

"And I just *can't* keep still," said Denise, prancing for very joy. "Mama, *do* you think

Pokey will be pleased with the gifts we have for her?"

"I 'm sure she will, darling."

Monday afternoon Denise had to content herself with going in the big sleigh to meet Pokey, for Ned had none, and the snow put wheeling out of the question.

So, well rolled up in her furs and the robes, she sat waiting for the train, while John flapped his hands about to keep warm, for the day was bitterly cold, and even his fur gloves and big fur cape could not keep Jack Frost out.

Flash and Sunshine pawed the snow impatiently, for they much preferred a good spanking trot to waiting at a railway-station on such a day. But their wait was not a long one, and soon they were spinning off home, flinging snowballs at Pokey and Papa, just to give them a sample of what horses could do. It was hard to tell which jingled the louder, the bells on their harness or the tongues in the sleigh.

"How shall we wait for Wednesday to get here?" asked Denise.

"Can you guess what you are going to have for Christmas?" asked Pokey, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes.

"No, I have n't the least idea; but I know what I wish it could be."

"What?"

"I 'm not going to tell, but I do believe you know all about it. Do you?"

"Well, I should n't wonder if I could guess," replied Pokey.

"Oh, do just tell me the color, and I won't ask a single word more," begged Denise.

"Let me see. Maroon, cardinal, dark green, black, white, silver, gold, and a little pale blue, I think."

"What under the sun can it be? — a plaid dress? I don't want any more dresses."

"No; it is n't a dress."

"Maybe it 's the Christmas tree."

"No; but you are not to guess any more."

"Well, I won't, then; but I never can wait without flying all to bits. I wonder if it moves?"

"Yes, sometimes, and sings, too." And Pokey laughed as though she could tell a very pleasant secret, if she had a mind; but never a word or hint did she let slip.

By this time they were at home, and Denise flew into the house, crying, "I 've got

her! I've got her!" as though Pokey were a wild duck or some such trophy.

"What have you been doing since my last visit?" asked Pokey, when they were all seated around the pleasant open fire in the library, that evening.

"Studying in the morning, and teaching Ned his tricks in the afternoon. You ought to see him do them. He is just too cute for anything! John made me a regular circus-ring out in the vegetable garden, and before the snow came I taught Ned all sorts of funny tricks."

"I hope you taught him not to chase *me* any more," said Pokey, with some feeling.

"No; I thought that was too funny to unteach. But to-morrow I'll show you what he *can* do. I can't show you in the ring, but he will do them just as well in the Bird's Nest."

"How do you keep warm out there in such awful cold weather?" asked Pokey.

"Why, did n't you know it was heated by a furnace?"

"I never thought anything about it till now, when you said we would go out there to-morrow, and I did n't want to freeze stiff *before* Christmas."

"I don't believe she will *after*; do you, Mama?" asked Denise, with a laugh.

"Hardly, unless she takes a fancy to explore Hudson Bay, or some such cold place where *seals* live," answered Mama.

Pokey looked very mystified, and failed to understand what possible connection there could be between herself and the seals, although Mama's emphasis on *seals* set her to guessing.

But Christmas morning she began to get her wits sharpened.

"This is most unusual weather for this season of the year," said Mr. Lombard, who had walked over to the bay-window to look out upon the snowy landscape shining in the bright moonlight. "If such intense cold lasts," he added, "we shall have skating on the river for Christmas."

"Oh, *do* you think so?" exclaimed Denise. "Just think, Pokey; we could go on the river, and take Ned with us to drag the sled, for John had him sharp-shod only a week ago. Would n't it be *splendid*?"

"You may take *Ned*, but you won't take the *sled*, I know," replied Pokey.

"Why *not*, I'd like to know? Of course

we will ; and it will just *spin* over the ice. Why don't you want me to ? ”

“ I don't like *sleds*,” said Pokey, with emphasis on *sleds*.

“ Why, I thought you loved to coast, and this will be just the same, only *nicer*.”

“ No ; I prefer riding in *sleighs*,” said Pokey, in such a suggestive tone that Mama, who sat behind Denise, shook her head and wagged an admonishing finger at the mischievous Pokey.

“ Then I guess you 'll have to go in the big one with Papa and Mama, for I 'm going with Toodledums, if we go at all,” said Denise.

“ Well, there is only one more day to wait, anyway, and I hope it will just fly by, for there never were such nice Christmases as we have here, and I can hardly wait for the day after to-morrow to come,” was Pokey's reply.

CHAPTER XXIII

NED IS PUT THROUGH HIS PACES

IT is fortunate for little folk that the days preceding Christmas are short ones, or they never *would* be able to bottle up their impatience and keep the cork in.

Happily Ned's newly acquired tricks proved a safety-valve for Denise and Pokey.

As soon as possible, next morning, they betook themselves to the Nest, and Master Ned was put through his paces.

First Denise put a bridle on, and then slipped a surcingle around him, to which she loosely fastened a check-rein to keep him from poking his inquisitive nose where it was not wanted.

Ned knew exactly what was expected of him, and directly Denise raised her riding-whip, up he rose upon his hind legs, and walked toward her, pawing the air with his

front feet, and flirting his long tail behind him like a train of a gown.

When he reached her, he came down upon all fours, and at a motion from her hand knelt down on his knees and touched the floor with his nose.

Pokey stood by, with her hands clasped in silent rapture, not daring to stir a speck lest she should distract the performer. At Denise's command he got up, and then Pokey had a rapture.

"How did you *ever* do it, or make him understand what you wanted him to do?"

"I half believe he understands every word I say to him, anyway; for when I stood in front of him, and raised my whip over my head, and said, 'Up, up,' he seemed to know just what I wanted, and got right up on his hind legs. Each time he did it he got a little higher; and at last, holding an apple on the end of a stick as high as I could reach, I got him to walk after me.

"When he reached me, and got down on all four feet again, I took hold of one foot, and bent it under him, and said, 'Down, down,' till he got on his knees, and then I put the apple on the floor, and he got it—did n't

you, you dear old darling?" said Denise, hugging him.

"Did you ever whip him?"

"*Whip* him! Well, I guess *not*. I only have the whip to point with, and he is no more afraid of it than he is of a piece of straw. I don't believe he knows what it is for. Do you?" she said to the little pet, whose warm face was snuggled close beside her, and who seemed to feel that the arm thrown caressingly across his soft neck was the nicest sort of collar ever invented.

"Do make him do something else," said the delighted Pokey, when Ned had finished munching his apple, which was never denied him.

"Now he is going to be a dead horse—are n't you?" And Ned nodded his head "yes."

"And will you get alive again when I tell you to?"

Another nod in the affirmative.

"Do you like to be dead?"

A decided shake "no."

"I guess I won't dead him here," said Denise, laughing. "The floor is too hard. We will go into the dining-room, and he can go dead on the rug."

Opening the communicating door, she went into the play-house, with Ned following close at her heels, and Pokey bringing up the rear.

Pushing the table and chairs to the wall, she sat down on the rug, and said:

“Poor Ned Toodles is so sick! I ’m afraid he is going to die.”

Then the comical little scamp proceeded to stretch himself out upon the floor, and putting his head into Denise’s lap, drew a long breath as though it were his last.

“Now, who ever heard of a horse dying with his eyes wide open, I ’d like to know?” demanded Denise, and she put a hand over the big brown eye looking up at her so knowingly.

When she raised it again the eye remained tight shut, and Ned was to all appearances quite defunct.

“Sugar!” cried Denise; and up popped the dead pony to search her hands and coat pockets for his beloved sweetie.

“Not till you dance for it,” said Denise, and she began softly to whistle a little waltz song.

Round and round went Ned in perfect time to the song, giving a funny little hop at each

turn, as though to emphasize the tune. After five or six turns he felt that he had done his duty, and stopped for his lump of sugar.

"Now I 'll get John to bring in his pedestal, and you shall see him do his 'pose,'" said Ned's proud mistress, highly delighted at the impression her beloved favorite was making; for it was difficult to tell which she loved best, Pokey, or the dear little shaggy play-fellow.

The willing John soon had the "pedestal" in position, and after giving Ned a good-natured mauling, and charging him to "be afther behavin' hims'lf foine for Miss Pokey," he left the children to their amusement.

"Come, Ned, and do your pose," said Denise; and the good-natured little fellow got himself upon the box, and soon had one foot resting on a block of wood, and the other raised to the top of a post which was considerably higher and had been fastened to slant a little outward, thus giving him a very graceful if somewhat trying attitude.

He seemed to realize that he looked very handsome perched up there, for he arched his neck and looked as self-conscious as possible.

"I never, never saw anything like him!" cried Pokey. "I 've seen big horses at a circus do such things, but he is so little to know so much."

"Well, I just guess you 've got as much sense as those big horses, have n't you, you precious scrap?" said Denise, when Ned had come down off his perch and been rewarded by a second lump of sugar.

"I wish you could have seen him play hide-and-go-seek with me, before the snow came. I would leave the stable door open, and tell him to stand still, and he would n't move. Then I 'd go hide somewhere in the grounds, and whistle for him, and he would come as hard as he could run, and hunt everywhere till he found me. As soon as he spied me he would kick up his heels and scramble back to the stable as fast as he could go."

Certainly the tricks had served to pass the morning in a manner highly satisfactory to all, and the short winter afternoon soon slipped away, to bring Christmas eve and all its jollity upon them. All was bustle and fun, for the big tree had to be brought into the library, and all helped to dress it. John was sent up the step-ladder to put the ornaments

on top, while the big people and little decked the lower branches with all manner of lovely trifles sent out from a big toy-store in New York.

"I hear, soor," said John, from his lofty perch, "that a man is afther dhrivin' over from Tarrytown on the ice this afternoon."

"You don't say so!" cried Mr. Lombard. "That is good news, John, for we can have a sleigh-ride on the river to-morrow. Mind you have Ned harnessed to Miss Denise's little *sled*, and tie on a *dinner*-bell if you can find nothing better; for we *must* have *bells*."

"I'll not forget, soor," said John, with a pleased laugh.

By eleven o'clock the tree was indeed a pretty sight, and then the packages, big and little, square and round, flat and thick, knobby and smooth, were laid beneath it, to be opened next morning, and the children were hurried off to bed.

Before they settled themselves for the night, the stockings had to be hung, and much guessing went on as to what would be fished out next morning.

"I'm going to keep wide awake till Aunt Helen and Mama come for our stockings, and

then squeak at them after they have filled them," said Denise.

"I 'm *not*," said Pokey. "I 'm too tired and sleepy to care what they put in; and if I go straight to sleep, morning will come quicker."

"I 'm not going to sleep, if you do," declared Denise, with a yawn that nearly split her jaws asunder, and promptly denied the words.

Pokey laughed, and, snuggling herself down under the covers, was soon dreaming of a Christmas tree upon the top of which Ned was dancing a waltz, while Denise played a tune on a round bundle which she had taken from beneath the tree, and which kept turning into a tin horn.

Denise, no doubt, intended to keep her word; but keen wintry winds and snug beds are not likely to keep an eleven-year-old maiden wide awake, so Mama and Auntie filled the stockings without being interrupted by the "squeak."

CHAPTER XXIV

STOCKINGS

“**M**ERRY Christmas, Pokey, merry Christmas!” shouted Denise, long before daylight. “Wake up, quick, and let’s see what we have in our stockings”; and she bounced out of bed to turn up the gas.

Pokey needed no second shake that morning, and soon both were down on the hearth-rug, with two very fat, queer-shaped stockings before them.

Before the investigation began, Denise poked the logs, which burst into a blaze, as though they were all ready to join in the merrymaking.

“You do yours first,” said Denise; and Pokey began in her solemn, breathless way to take out one article after another.

First a dainty box of bonbons; next a pretty pair of silk mittens, with “Grandma”

written on a slip of paper and pinned to them ; then a big orange, with eyes, nose, and mouth, as well as mustache and whiskers, cut on it — unmistakably Papa's ; a lot of nuts ; a little box marked " Aunt Helen," and in it a pretty silver bangle ; more nuts, and then a big box which stuck fast in the toe and had to be coaxed out. This was marked " Mama," and upon opening it, another box was found, and opening that, still *another*, like the magic nut in the story of the " White Cat."

" I don't believe there *is* anything. It 's all fun," said Denise, whose patience was on tenter-hooks.

" Yes, there *is*, too. I 'm coming to it now, and there it is — oh !" And Pokey hugged a dainty little gold necklace, with pretty heart-shaped locket, upon which little Dan Cupid was painted in enamel.

" Is n't it just too sweet for *anything* ? — and I 've always wanted a necklace. Quick ! take out your things and see what you 've got. I *know* there can't be anything as lovely as *this*"; and she put her necklace on over her night-dress to try the effect.

" Here 's a box of candy just like yours ; let 's eat one to celebrate Christmas. And



CHRISTMAS MORNING.

look! here are mittens from Grandma, only mine are brown and yours blue. I wonder what this can be? A little box from Aunt Helen. Should n't wonder if I had a bangle too. No, it is n't, either; it's — ah! an opal ring! That's my lucky stone, because I was born in October. Is n't it *lovely*? See, it just fits, and shines just like the flames."

Several minutes were passed in admiring the pretty little ring as it flashed back the colors of the fire, and then the rummage was resumed.

"Oh, what *can* this be? A big apple with Papa's face cut on that too. Is n't it the funniest thing you ever saw? I wonder how he ever did it?" And a bubbling laugh came to keep Christmas. "Such a lot of nuts! I'd like to eat some this minute, only I know Mama would n't like to have me eat such things before breakfast.

"Now, whatever is this?" And Denise undid something carefully wrapped in tin-foil.

"Oh, Pokey, Pokey, do see! A big lump of make-believe *taffy*, and two tin spoons tied on it! That old John! I just *know* he got this for me. Never mind; there is *real* candy in-

side of it, and he can laugh all he has a mind to."

"Wonder why he did n't put in a *pan* while he was about it?" said practical Pokey.

"Now, let's hurry and get to the bottom, if I ever *can* shake out all these nuts. There is a big box in the toe, just like yours. Don't I wish it could be a necklace too!" And Denise fell to unwrapping box after box as Pokey had done.

"*It is!*" And she drew out a beautiful little necklace in rope pattern, with a small locket in the form of a horseshoe, the nails being tiny turquoises. Inside was Ned's own little face on one side, and Papa's smiled at her from the opposite.

She uttered a cry of delight, and fell to kissing them as hard as she could, and it was some time before Pokey could persuade her to leave off to dress for breakfast.

"I don't believe I *can* have anything that will please me more than this necklace," said Pokey, when they were both dressed in their pretty plaid dresses,—one in deep reds, the other in deep greens,—and both adorned with the new necklaces, with the bangle to jingle and the ring to glitter.

"I 'm sure I don't know of anything else I could have, for I 've got every wish now," exclaimed Denise.

Two hours later, all the household, from Grandma down to Eliza Cook, were assembled in the pleasant library, while Papa distributed the gifts; for in this home none was forgotten, and all shared the greatest of all holidays, feeling in the fullest sense "good will toward men."

Each received some pretty and appropriate gift, and from Grandma's warm sealskin hood for a sleigh-ride, to Beauty Buttons's new ball and collar, the gift suited the recipient.

Pokey's delight when she opened a box containing a lovely little collar and muff of otter was quite beyond words, and the happy child just hugged them up in her arms and cried over them.

"*Now* I know why you said I might like to go to see the seals," said she, when her emotions had been brought under control; "for otters and seals are *cousins*, are n't they?" And she hugged her treasures, too happy to think of trying them on.

At last the final parcel was presented, and hearty thanks given to those who had so

wisely and generously remembered each and all. Even Sailor paraded about with a great blue satin bow on his collar, and a huge rubber ball in his mouth, wagging his plummy tail, and getting into everybody's way.

"It 's just too bad that dear little Ned can't come indoors and have some fun too. We have all had something nice, and he has not had a single thing, and I think it 's a great shame," said Denise, with some feeling; for Ned had shared all her good times for the past year, and she felt only half there without him.

"So it is," said Papa. "John, go fetch him up to the door, and we will feed him cream-drops, anyway. Put on your wraps, children, and then we can stay out a little."

By some mysterious power, all seemed to have suddenly become children again, for each hurried into a wrap of some sort, and went out upon the piazza.

"I guess Ned will get a feast if we *all* feed him cream-drops," said Denise, as they stood waiting for him.

In a moment she heard a silvery jingle, and the next instant bonny Ned, harnessed to an exquisite little Albany cutter, dashed

around the corner of the Bird's Nest, where John had kept him hidden, all ready to produce at an instant's notice.

So when Papa gave the hint under cover of cream-drops, John hurried away to get his charge. Whisking off Ned's blanket, he stepped into the sleigh, and gathering up the reins, drove the star actor, with all his properties, before the admiring audience.

A string of silver bells encircled him, and bright scarlet plumes waved on his head, as he pranced and curveted up to the door.

Denise was simply speechless. Her eyes went from one point to the other of the dainty rig, and then she walked calmly down the steps; went up to Ned, and kissed his white moon; turned to the sleigh, and touched it gingerly, as though afraid it might vanish; walked around it, and, finally getting into it, drew the beautiful bear-skin robe around her and tucked it in, without uttering one word.

Then looking up to the piazza, where all stood watching her, she said: "I don't *think* it is all a dream, and I do believe I've got my last Christmas wish; but if I should wake up and find it one, I think I would just wish I had never come into the world. Pokey,"—with a

sudden change of voice and tone,—“ come here this minute and *pinch* me.”

Down flew the delighted Pokey, crying all in one breath, as she scrambled into the seat beside Denise: “Is n’t it maroon, cardinal, dark green, black, white, silver, gold, and a little pale blue?”

“I don’t know what *color* it is. I only know I ’m going straight up there to hug that blessed Papa’s *head* ’most off, and give Mama a *million* kisses”; and out she tumbled to give vent to her pent-up feelings.

CHAPTER XXV

THE STAR ACTOR'S FAREWELL APPEARANCE

AFTER Denise had fulfilled her mission, and Papa and Mama had received the reward, which was, to them, the most precious that could be given, she took time to examine the lovely little sleigh, which, from its dainty gold monogram on the dash-board, to the snug foot-warmer, with another monogram embroidered by Mama's kind hands in gold floss upon pretty brown cloth, was as perfect as the united efforts of those who loved her so dearly could make it.

"Shall I fetch out the little schled and the dinner-bell, Miss Denise?" asked John.

"No, thank you; I'd rather have *taffy* and *two* spoons—it won't melt this weather," answered Denise, with a mischievous laugh.

"Faith, ye have me there, and no misthake, and so I'll only be wishin' ye good luck with

yer dandy little rig"; and John's good-natured laugh emphasized his wish.

When she had finished admiring her prettiest of all the Christmas gifts, she drove back to the Bird's Nest to let Ned wait in its shelter till she and Pokey were ready to start for their ride on the river.

There she found another surprise awaiting her, for the body of the depot-wagon had been placed on a cunning set of "bobs," and was ready for use when the little cutter should prove too dainty for a grand frolic, or too small for an extra large load.

"I don't believe any girl ever had so many nice things all at once," said Denise, when she and Pokey had hopped in and out of the bob-sleigh about a dozen times, and examined every bolt and bar very critically.

"I believe I've the dearest, *bestest*, nicest Papa and Mama and Grandma that ever lived, for Grandma made the warm mittens, and so helped the surprise."

"I just guess you *have*," was the positive reply; "and they are just as nice to me as they are to you. I think my fur collar and muff the dearest anybody ever had."

Presently they both ran into the house to

prepare for the morning sleigh-ride ; for Papa, Mama, and Aunt Helen were to go in the big sleigh, with John to drive them, and the children would follow in the "toy sled," as John insisted upon calling the cutter, to Denise's intense disgust.

Ned seemed to enjoy the cutter immensely as it slipped so easily behind him, and the cold weather made him frisk and prance.

A short drive brought them to the frozen river, which by this time presented a very lively appearance, for the holiday set everybody free to enjoy the sleighing and skating, and a perfect day brought the whole town and the town's friends to the ice.

Driving down a steep hill, they reached the edge of the ice, and here a very funny thing happened. Ned positively refused to go upon it. He planted his tiny feet close to the edge, and then he stopped, shaking his head, snorting, and evincing every sign of fear ; for he could not understand how it was possible for him to walk on a *river*, and he had no idea of committing suicide.

Denise coaxed and scolded, but it was of no use till she got out of the cutter and went upon the ice herself ; then the little fellow

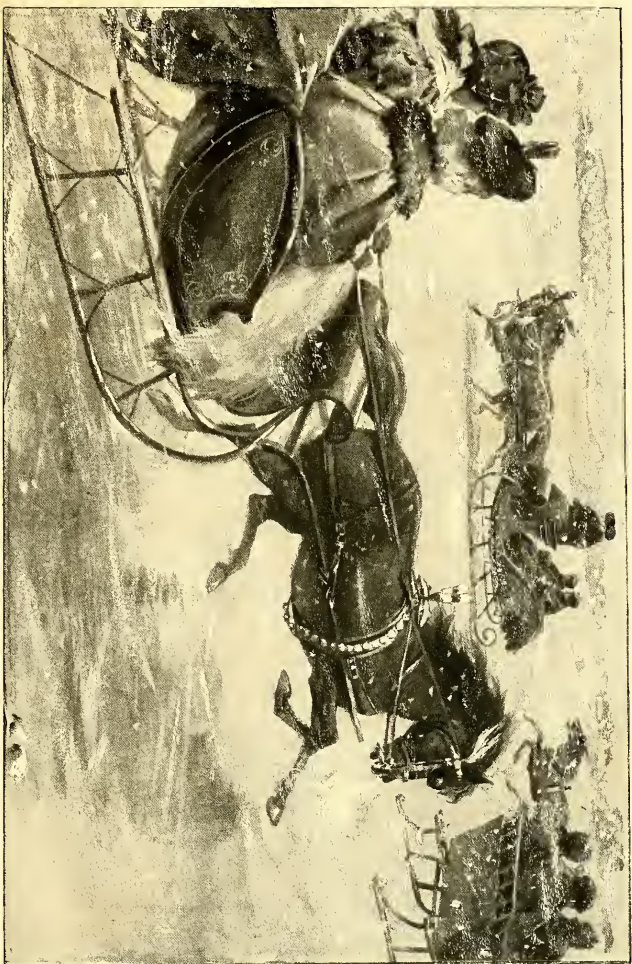
looked at her very questioningly for a moment, and, as she called to him, began to step forward very gingerly, as though he doubted the evidence of his own eyesight. Feeling his way carefully, he got well out upon the ice and close up to Denise, where he stood trembling and looking about him.

But she soon calmed his fears by stroking him and petting him; and as Sunshine and Flash dashed by a moment later, the last remnant of his fears vanished, and with a long neigh he was ready to dash after them.

Giving a final pat, she jumped into the sleigh, and away went Ned full tilt, the tiny cutter skimming over the smooth ice as though it had wings on the runners.

Such a glorious morning as that was, driving up and down the river, and once away across to Tarrytown; for a steady stream of sleighs was going to and fro, and the ice was thick enough to hold a regiment, if necessary.

Dinner-hour came all too soon, and our party had to start homeward, much to Ned's disgust; for he liked the smooth surface to skip over, and was as reluctant to leave it as he had been disinclined to go upon it, and



“THE TINY CUTTER SKIMMING OVER THE SMOOTH ICE.”

required nearly as much coaxing to induce him to go back to terra firma, where home and an extra Christmas feed awaited him.

And now we will leave him and Denise as they are climbing the hill toward that dear home and a merry Christmas dinner; for I am sure we have told enough about them to please all the lads and lasses who love ponies and their performances, although we know that all ponies are not as wise as the one we have been telling about, or their little mistresses as much indulged. Do you wonder if she grew up to be wise and unselfish, or disagreeable? Who can tell? But one thing I know quite positively. To this day she loves horses and ponies, and they love and trust her just the same, and never fail to come to her call; and as she passes along the streets she often stops to speak to some horse, and pat him, or give him a lump of sugar from a little pocket which she keeps filled with lumps for that very purpose.

Several horses have gotten to know her quite well, and always whinny softly when they hear her voice. Perhaps she is the only one from whom they ever receive a kind word or gentle touch, and they are always very grateful.

But she loves them all, whether they be handsome or ugly, happy or wretched, just for the sake of dear little Ned Toddles.

But many years passed before she had to bid little Ned farewell, and all were happy, and filled with delightful times, although none was quite equal to the first one, which brought all the surprises.

Ned, Tan, and "the children" lived long and prospered finely, and were quite as much members of the family as real folk.

Many of their pictures are still kept by Denise, who often looks at them, and thinks of the happy hours she spent with the originals, and then tells her own little Denise of the wild pranks in which they figured.





